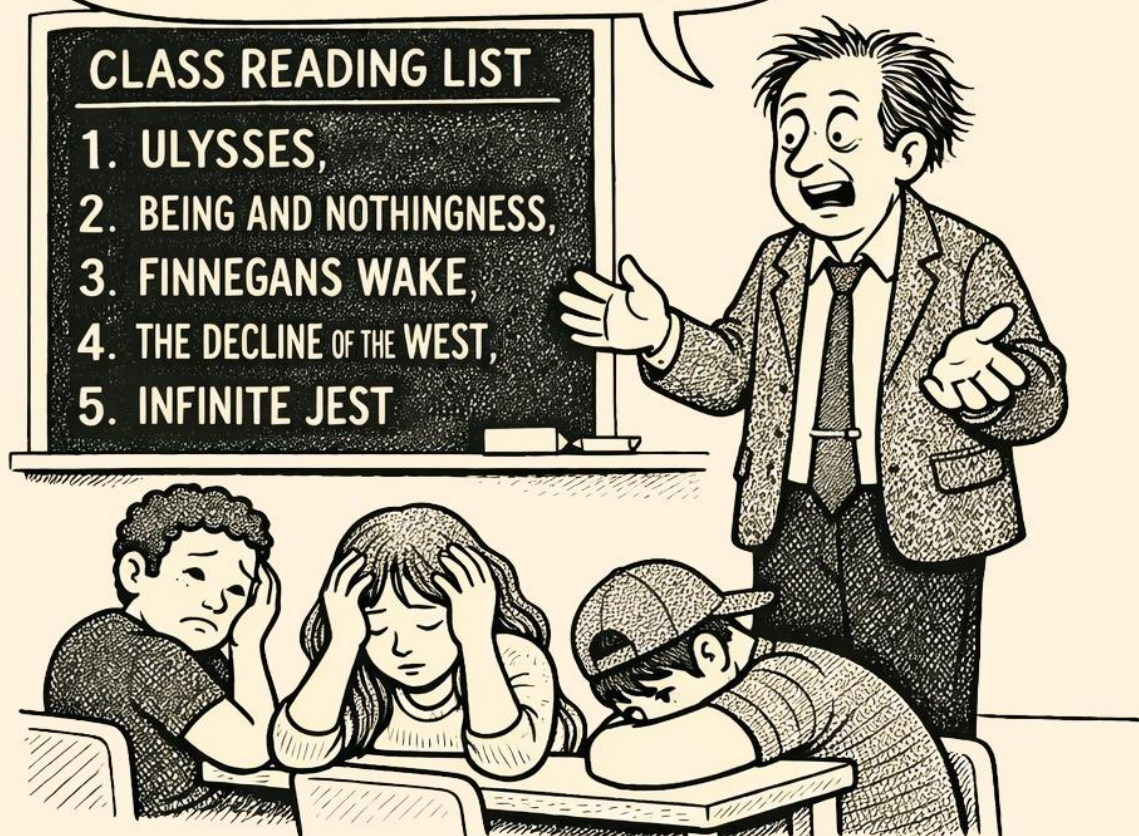


ENTROPIC CIVILISATION

Our civilization is collapsing because
of too much reading, information overload
and paralysis of thinking.



by **Peter Ayolov**

THE MISCOMMUNICATION TRILOGY

"The Entropy of Communication, Vol. II"

SAMIZDAT 2026

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First part

ENTROPIC CIVILISATION

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Introduction: A Tool For Civilisation

This volume continues the broader investigation developed in the Miscommunication Trilogy, which explores the paradoxical power of language as both the foundation and the vulnerability of human civilisation. The Entropy of Communication, Volume II examines how communication systems that once stabilised societies gradually begin to generate disorder, fragmentation, and distrust as their meanings erode. The first part, Entropic Civilisation, focuses on the historical and structural processes through which official languages, media systems, and ideological narratives initially unify populations but later dissolve into miscommunication and noise. At the centre of the trilogy stands the concept of the planned obsolescence of language, the idea that words, slogans, and institutional discourses slowly lose their capacity to convey shared meaning while continuing to circulate as empty forms. As meanings decay, communication expands in quantity but declines in clarity, producing a condition in which societies speak more than ever while understanding less than before. The chapters that follow therefore examine how this entropy of language transforms politics, media, and public discourse, gradually turning the very tool that once built civilisation into the mechanism of its disintegration.

What is the most powerful instrument ever created by human societies? Not the sword, not the machine, not even money. The true tool of civilisation is written official language. Long before modern technology, before industrial power and digital networks, civilisations were built through words fixed in writing. Laws, sacred texts, imperial decrees, constitutions, bureaucratic regulations, scientific treatises and literary canons all relied on a single fundamental technology: the ability to stabilise language in written form and make it authoritative. Written official language allowed scattered tribes to become nations, kingdoms to become empires, and empires to imagine themselves as eternal orders. Yet this same instrument, which constructs civilisation, also contains within it the seeds of decay. Language is both the architect and the demolition device of civilisations. It builds them, sustains them, and eventually destroys them when meaning expires. The paradox is ancient and well known. In the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, humanity attempts to build a unified civilisation through a single language. The ambition is not merely architectural but linguistic: unity of speech promises unity of power. But the same medium that makes the project possible also brings about its destruction. When language fractures, the tower collapses. Babel reveals a profound truth about civilisation: communication creates order, but communication also contains the possibility of disorder. When language ceases to carry shared meaning, society itself begins to disintegrate.

Written official language functions as the operating system of civilisation. It allows institutions to exist beyond the limits of individual memory. Laws can be recorded, traditions preserved, and knowledge accumulated across generations. Without writing, political authority remains fragile and local. With writing, authority becomes abstract and durable. Empires such as Rome, China, and the Islamic caliphates were not only military structures but linguistic systems, sustained by official languages that organised administration, law, religion and culture. Latin, classical Chinese and Arabic were not merely means of communication; they were frameworks of reality. Through them, civilisations learned to imagine themselves as coherent entities. Yet language has a life cycle. Words accumulate prestige, authority and emotional force only as long as people believe in them. Over time, however, meanings erode. Concepts that once inspired loyalty become empty formulas repeated without conviction. Ideologies become clichés, slogans replace arguments, and official language transforms into ritual. At that moment civilisation enters a dangerous phase: the moment when language continues to function

mechanically even though its meaning has already expired. This process resembles a civilisational ‘kill switch’. Language is the mechanism that allows complex societies to coordinate action, but it also contains the trigger that can abruptly end their coherence. When words lose credibility, institutions built upon those words begin to collapse. Laws remain written, but they are no longer respected. Ideological narratives continue to circulate, but they no longer persuade. Official discourse becomes noise rather than guidance. Civilisation, which once relied on language as its organising principle, begins to dissolve into miscommunication.

History repeatedly confirms this pattern. Every major civilisation developed a powerful official language that unified its population and legitimised authority. Latin unified the Roman Empire, classical Chinese sustained the bureaucratic order of imperial China, and Arabic carried the intellectual and religious unity of the Islamic world. These languages allowed vast territories and diverse populations to function as coherent systems. But when these linguistic frameworks lost their living vitality, political decline soon followed. Words became ceremonial shells, preserved in institutions but no longer capable of sustaining collective belief. The modern world is not exempt from this pattern. Contemporary societies are built upon complex linguistic infrastructures: legal codes, scientific terminology, media discourse, and digital communication systems. These structures enable unprecedented levels of coordination and knowledge exchange. Yet they also produce a new form of vulnerability. When communication becomes excessive, when words multiply faster than meaning, societies begin to experience a form of communicational entropy. Information expands endlessly while understanding contracts. In the digital age this contradiction intensifies. Never before have human beings produced so many words. Social networks, media platforms and digital archives generate an ocean of language in which every opinion, narrative and slogan competes for attention. But abundance does not necessarily produce clarity. Instead, it often produces fragmentation. Language multiplies into countless dialects of ideology, identity and cultural conflict. Instead of a shared official discourse that unifies society, communication fragments into rival linguistic camps.

This fragmentation resembles a modern version of Babel. The difference is that the tower has already been built. Global civilisation possesses the technological infrastructure to connect billions of people in real time. Yet the very system that makes universal communication possible simultaneously generates unprecedented levels of misunderstanding. The more people speak, the less they understand each other. Language expands, but meaning evaporates. At this point civilisation encounters the paradox of its own tool. Written official language once created unity, but its proliferation now produces division. Communication becomes saturated with competing narratives, each claiming authority but none capable of establishing lasting consensus. Words that once united societies now function as weapons in ideological conflict. The tool that built civilisation begins to dismantle it from within. Understanding this paradox is essential for analysing the current crisis of communication. Civilisations do not collapse merely because of economic decline or military defeat. They collapse when the language that sustains their institutions loses coherence. When citizens no longer trust official words, when public discourse becomes indistinguishable from propaganda or noise, the foundations of collective life begin to crumble. Language is therefore both the beginning and the end of civilisation. It creates the possibility of organised society by establishing shared meaning, but it also carries within it the potential for disorder when that meaning deteriorates. Civilisations rise when language unifies people around common narratives, and they fall when those narratives become empty forms repeated without belief.

The story of Babel remains relevant because it captures this structural truth. Humanity attempted to build a unified civilisation through a single language, believing that communication would guarantee permanence. Instead, language itself became the instrument of fragmentation. The lesson is not that language is dangerous, but that it is unstable. It is a tool that must constantly renew its meaning in order to sustain the societies built upon it. Every civilisation therefore lives under a linguistic condition: as long as words carry meaning, the social order remains intact. When meaning expires, language becomes the switch that shuts the system down. The same instrument that once built the tower quietly activates the mechanism of its collapse. In this sense language is not merely the foundation of civilisation but its most delicate component. It is the architecture of collective life and at the same time the fuse that can ignite its disintegration. Civilisations are built with words, but they also perish when those words lose their power to mean.

1. Mass Miscommunication

The End of Mass Communication

The story of mass communication is less a tale of progress than one of repetition. Throughout history, every civilisation, empire, and state has tried to build systems of language and ideology that could bind people together, legitimise power, and project permanence. Yet each time, those systems eventually disintegrated. The future of mass communication is best understood by recognising this cycle of construction and collapse: it is not a linear march toward clarity and unity, but a rhythm of miscommunication, entropy, and renewal. In the digital age, these tendencies are intensified rather than overcome. At the heart of mass communication lies the principle of control. Rulers have long alternated between strategies of ‘unite and control’ and ‘divide and control’, seeking either to create a common narrative that suppresses dissent or to fragment society into manageable divisions. For centuries, official language—whether sacred texts, imperial decrees, or state propaganda—served as the mechanism for enforcing cohesion. Yet history shows that no language system, however well designed, can escape entropy. Words lose their power, ideologies are hollowed out, and once-unifying discourses become instruments of suspicion and decay. The fall of Rome, the dissolution of medieval Christendom, the collapse of colonial empires, and the disintegration of twentieth-century totalitarian states all reveal the same pattern: mass communication does not guarantee permanence, but accelerates collapse when its credibility erodes. In the contemporary era, the erosion of official language has produced what might be called a digital Babel. The Internet bypasses traditional gatekeepers and disperses authority across countless voices. Governments, religious institutions, and media conglomerates once controlled the flow of information, but that monopoly has ended. Instead of a single authoritative discourse, societies now endure a cacophony of competing narratives. This fragmentation resembles the biblical story of the Tower of Babel: as language splinters, people scatter into rival camps unable to communicate across their divides. The proliferation of dialects—whether cultural, political, or ideological—creates enclaves where meaning circulates only among the initiated. Mass communication becomes mass miscommunication, not a shared space of understanding but a battlefield of mutually unintelligible discourses. This fragmentation is not neutral. It is commodified and exploited. In the digital marketplace, language itself has become a private asset rather than a public good. Algorithms reward polarisation because outrage fuels attention, and attention

translates into profit. Every word typed, every post shared, every quarrel online becomes a data point monetised by corporations. Communication is no longer primarily about meaning but about engagement. Miscommunication thrives because it generates more clicks than understanding ever could. What was once a medium of common life now functions as a commodity stripped of its ethical purpose. The manufacture of dissent is the clearest expression of this transformation. In earlier eras, elites attempted to manufacture consent: to create a unified narrative that legitimised authority. Today, power operates differently. Fragmentation is deliberately fostered, because a divided population cannot mount a coherent challenge. By flooding societies with contradictory truths, conspiracy theories, and ideological extremes, those who benefit from the chaos ensure that disagreement remains permanent. Dissent becomes less a genuine expression of freedom than a carefully managed tool of control. What appears as liberty is in fact paralysis, since fractured voices cannot combine into collective action. The consequences for civilisation are profound. Communication once created the possibility of shared identity, of democracy, of common purpose. When language fragments, these possibilities diminish. Entropy of language—where meaning breaks down and mutual understanding collapses—threatens the very survival of social orders. It is not simply a cultural problem but a political one. Democracies rely on the assumption that citizens can deliberate together. Without a minimum of shared meaning, public discourse disintegrates, leaving only mistrust and manipulation. The collapse of past empires shows that when ideological and linguistic systems lose credibility, institutions soon follow. What then is the future of mass communication? History suggests it will continue to follow its cyclical pattern. Attempts at centralised control may reappear, promising unity through new official languages or technocratic discourses. But these too will face decline as words lose resonance and dissent corrodes trust. At the same time, decentralised communities will form their own linguistic micro-worlds, bound together by shared vocabularies but isolated from wider society. Some of these communities will embody ideals of solidarity and mutual aid; others will resemble mafias or extremist sects, offering loyalty and order in place of legitimacy. In both cases, communication will function as glue for smaller groups rather than as a bridge for humanity as a whole. The promise of digital technologies is that they could create new models of dialogue, built on trust and reciprocity rather than manipulation. Yet the reality so far is that they accelerate division. Social media rewards quick reaction over careful thought, hostility over empathy, spectacle over truth. To imagine a future where mass communication does not collapse into miscommunication requires a radical change in how digital spaces are designed and how language is valued. Education that fosters critical thinking and empathy may help, but no system can escape the historical rhythm entirely. The lesson of history is sobering: mass communication is always temporary. It builds, it unites, it controls—but eventually it fragments, corrodes, and collapses. Civilisations fall when their language systems lose coherence, and new orders arise from the ruins. The future of mass communication will be no different. The cycle of miscommunication is not an accident but a structural feature of human societies. The only question is how long the current system can endure before it too joins the ruins of the past. Louder voices in the struggle of mass communication, amplified by endless repetition and copying, lead not to greater clarity but to deeper miscommunication, where hearing and understanding fade.

Language and Social Decline

Language is the foundation of culture, knowledge, and social organisation. It is the medium through which people preserve memory, transmit wisdom, and negotiate the terms of collective life. Yet history demonstrates that when language declines—whether through simplification, commodification, or deliberate misuse—societies themselves become fragile. Miscommunication on a mass scale corrodes trust, erodes continuity, and undermines the capacity of communities to sustain themselves. The fate of civilisations is bound to the fate of their words, and misused language has often signalled the beginning of decline. The decline of language is more than a matter of vocabulary or grammar. It represents a weakening of the cultural fabric. When nuance is lost, when richness of expression gives way to slogans and trivialities, societies lose their ability to engage in complex thought. This phenomenon can be traced in the Roman Empire. As its power waned, Latin grew increasingly simplified. Over time, the grammatical precision and subtlety that had once allowed Roman thinkers and lawmakers to articulate sophisticated concepts gave way to a looser vernacular. Some historians see in this linguistic erosion a mirror of the broader collapse of Roman order. The empire fractured politically, socially, and economically, but the breakdown of its linguistic coherence revealed how deeply the foundations had crumbled. Language, once the glue of empire, became another sign of disintegration. Philosophers have long recognised this link between words and civilisations. Oswald Spengler in 'The Decline of the West' argued that language reflects the inner spirit of a culture, and when words become shallow, societies lose their creative force. George Orwell's '1984' illustrated how impoverished language, in the form of Newspeak, can restrict thought and enslave populations. When words are stripped of complexity, people lose the ability to criticise, imagine alternatives, or resist control. Language, in this sense, is not just a mirror of decline but an active instrument in it: misuse of words can hasten collapse by making societies intellectually sterile and politically compliant. Yet this relationship is not always uncontested. Some argue that language change is natural and not necessarily harmful. Simplification can lead to inclusivity, and new forms of expression may foster innovation. But when change is driven by manipulation or by the reduction of language to mere utility, the effect is corrosive. The digital age has accelerated this problem. Social media platforms favour brevity, reaction, and spectacle over depth. Language is no longer cultivated as a shared public good but mined as a private asset. Every phrase becomes content to be monetised, every word a data point to be analysed and sold. Miscommunication thrives in such an environment because confusion and conflict drive engagement. Rather than creating understanding, language becomes a tool of division. The historical record offers both warnings and counterpoints. Rome collapsed as its language fractured, yet Byzantium endured for centuries by preserving Greek traditions, texts, and a coherent linguistic framework. China survived repeated dynastic collapses because the written script, Confucian texts, and cultural traditions bound society together even when political power shifted. The Jewish people endured exile and diaspora by preserving Hebrew as a liturgical language and by building intellectual traditions that kept identity alive. Islamic civilisation continued after the sack of Baghdad because Arabic preserved religious and philosophical knowledge. In each case, language continuity allowed survival despite political collapse. Conversely, when empires failed to preserve linguistic richness or allowed communication to become an instrument of manipulation, their decline accelerated. The modern world shows both possibilities at once. Digital technologies have fragmented communication into countless dialects of ideology, slang, and jargon. The result resembles a new Tower of Babel, where people talk incessantly yet fail to understand one another. Miscommunication is no longer incidental but systemic. Language is weaponised to

divide populations into warring camps, to foster distrust, and to prevent collective action. What once served to unite now ensures disintegration. At the same time, the very persistence of traditional languages, educational institutions, and cultural traditions suggests that continuity remains possible if words are treated as vessels of meaning rather than commodities. The stakes are high because language decline is inseparable from political decline. When words lose coherence, democracy falters, since public deliberation requires at least a minimal common vocabulary. When communication collapses into slogans, statesmanship gives way to populist manipulation. Civilisations cannot sustain themselves if their citizens are unable to converse meaningfully across differences. Miscommunication at scale becomes both a symptom and a cause of decline: it reflects disintegration and hastens it by ensuring that conflict cannot be resolved through dialogue. The lesson of history is that while armies and economies rise and fall, the survival of a civilisation depends on the preservation of its language and the integrity of its discourse. Those societies that guarded their linguistic heritage were able to endure catastrophe and rebuild. Those that squandered or distorted it hastened their collapse. In the present, where language is commodified and miscommunication thrives, the danger is that modern societies will follow the path of Rome rather than Byzantium or China. The misuse of words on a mass scale undermines not only communication but the very possibility of continuity, cohesion, and creativity. Language and civilisation rise and fall together. When words are misused, when communication degenerates into noise, societies lose the ability to preserve memory, transmit wisdom, and face challenges collectively. Miscommunication on a mass scale is not a passing inconvenience but a structural force of decline. History teaches that once language becomes shallow, repetitive, and weaponised, the fall of civilisations is not far behind. As societies expand their voices, they swell in scale and ambition, but the chorus of repetition breeds miscommunication, and the very growth that once sustained them becomes the seed of their decline.

The Living Dead Languages

The history of civilisation shows that languages are not only tools of expression but also instruments of power. Empires build their cohesion and extend their influence through a *lingua franca* that allows them to administer vast territories, absorb colonies, and unify diverse peoples. Yet the fate of these languages is often paradoxical. They do not vanish with the collapse of the empire but survive as ‘living dead languages’: no longer the vibrant speech of a dominant political community, but still lingering as global standards, cultural markers, or diplomatic codes. Their endurance slows the process of collapse, turning decline into a drawn-out twilight rather than a decisive revolution. Latin illustrates this pattern clearly. The Roman Empire used Latin as the common tongue of governance, law, and education. It bound together a vast population across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. But when the empire fractured, Latin did not die outright. Instead it fossilised. It ceased to be a living vernacular and splintered into the Romance languages, while surviving in the Church, in law, and in scholarship. Latin became a language of elites, a medium of tradition rather than invention. Its survival kept alive the structures of medieval Europe but also prevented the rise of a wholly new linguistic order until the vernaculars asserted themselves. Rome’s collapse was softened into a long decline by the persistence of a language that had lost its living force. A similar process can be seen in the modern European empires. English, during the height of the British Empire, became the global *lingua franca* of commerce, law, and diplomacy. Even after Britain’s imperial decline, English continued to expand, eventually becoming the dominant international language of science,

technology, and business. It no longer represents British power but instead functions as a global utility. This persistence is both a strength and a weakness. English binds together a worldwide network, but in doing so it also creates a situation where older structures linger and new forms struggle to emerge. The empire is gone, yet its voice remains, slowing the birth of alternative centres of linguistic power. English thus exemplifies the living dead condition: alive across the globe but detached from the state that once gave it force. French presents another variation. Once the language of diplomacy and culture, its influence stretched across Europe and colonial territories. The French Empire's political collapse after the Second World War did not eliminate the language's global presence. It survives in Africa, in Canada, and in international institutions. But its prestige has waned, overshadowed by English. French remains alive, yet increasingly as a heritage language, maintained through policy and tradition rather than natural global dominance. Like Latin, it endures in fragments, keeping alive the cultural reach of a faded empire but also binding postcolonial societies to an inherited tongue that hinders the creation of wholly new linguistic identities. These cases differ from languages such as Chinese and Russian, which are sustained by vast native-speaking populations. Mandarin Chinese, rooted in the world's largest linguistic community, has survived dynastic collapse, foreign conquest, and political upheaval. Russian, spoken by more than 150 million people, survived the dissolution of the Soviet Union and remains a marker of cultural and political continuity. The difference lies in demography: when millions carry a language in their daily lives, it cannot easily become a living dead tongue. It remains rooted in identity and everyday practice. Empires sustained by such languages may fall politically, but their civilisations endure more resiliently. By contrast, the fate of *lingua franca* languages with relatively smaller native cores is slower decay. Latin lingered for centuries after Rome, French continues in global institutions long after imperial decline, and English dominates international networks even as British influence diminishes. These languages prevent sharp revolutions because they keep alive frameworks of thought and communication that no longer reflect the living vitality of the societies that birthed them. France after its revolution and Russia after the Bolsheviks created new linguistic orders to signal rupture: the reinvention of French as the language of modern citizenship, and the Soviet transformation of Russian into the code of socialist internationalism. But most empires never make such a leap. Instead they drag their dead languages with them, and the result is a slow withering rather than a clean break. The persistence of living dead languages also affects postcolonial states. Former colonies often retain the imperial tongue as an administrative and cultural standard. English in India, French in West Africa, Spanish in Latin America: these languages remain the official voices of governance, law, and education. They provide continuity, but they also constrain creativity. Instead of forging new languages or elevating indigenous ones, societies remain tethered to inherited linguistic structures that preserve aspects of colonial dependence. The result is not revolutionary transformation but gradual decay, as the vitality of local expression is overshadowed by the weight of the old *lingua franca*. The paradox of the living dead languages is that their endurance delays collapse but also prevents renewal. They preserve the memory and influence of empires long after their political structures vanish, shaping culture and politics across continents. Yet their survival as dominant frameworks slows the emergence of new linguistic orders that might reflect new realities. The world remains haunted by the tongues of its empires, speaking in voices that are half alive, half dead, prolonging decline instead of opening space for rebirth. *Lingua franca* languages and networks of postcolonial countries sustain a slow decline rather than producing a revolutionary linguistic break. The empire may fall, but its living dead language lingers on, preserving the echo of power while quietly feeding the decay it delays. In 'The Tenacity of Forms: Language, Nation, Stalin' Michael G. Smith shows that Stalin treated language as both a philosophical form and a

political instrument, seeing it as central to the creation, cohesion, and survival of nations. For Stalin, language was neither fixed nor accidental but a historical force shaping identity and power, capable of uniting a multi-ethnic state while reflecting broader social transformations.

Language in the USSR

In 'Politics and the Theory of Language in the USSR 1917-1938: The Birth of Sociological Linguistics', Craig Brandist and Katya Chown examine how Soviet linguistics was forged in dialogue with politics and ideology. The Russian Revolution of 1917 did not merely topple a dynasty and replace it with a new government. It also unleashed a linguistic revolution. For the new communist authorities, survival depended on forging a new Russian language capable of carrying the weight of ideology, reshaping thought, and binding together the vast and diverse territories of the former empire. Just as the French Revolution had reinvented political language through reforms and rhetorical innovations, the Bolsheviks set out to engineer a tongue that could create a new civil contract and manufacture the consent of the governed. In this struggle, writers, playwrights, poets, linguists, propagandists, and journalists became weapons as decisive as armies. The new regime understood that without a linguistic foundation strong enough to support its political edifice, the communist experiment would collapse before it could consolidate. The period from 1917 to 1938 was thus one of intense experimentation. Language became a battlefield, a terrain on which the revolution sought to prove itself. Scholars and activists debated how to purge the remnants of the old order, how to standardise communication across a multi-ethnic empire, and how to shape a discourse that would transform peasants and workers into Soviet citizens. Figures such as Rozaliia Shor, Evgenii Polivanov, Valentin Voloshinov, and Grigorii Vinokur pushed forward sociological approaches to language, seeing it as not merely a neutral instrument but the very medium of ideology and collective consciousness. They rejected the idea that language was static. Instead, they insisted that it was a social phenomenon shaped by power and class, and therefore subject to revolutionary transformation. At the heart of these efforts was the belief that words could create a new world. Just as Jacobins in France had promoted new linguistic forms to mark the birth of a republican order, so Soviet reformers sought to reinvent vocabulary, syntax, and style to embody socialism. Old slogans and bourgeois clichés were condemned; new revolutionary terms were coined and circulated through schools, newspapers, plays, and propaganda. Language was not to reflect society but to direct it. The cultural revolution was inseparable from the linguistic one. This ambition produced remarkable innovations. Studies of the language of the Red Army showed how illiterate recruits were transformed into literate citizens through military education, absorbing new political vocabulary and ideological concepts. Linguists devised alphabets for minority languages, integrating distant peoples into the Soviet project while simultaneously promoting Russian as the unifying tongue. Applied linguistics emerged as a form of social engineering, with proposals for a 'culture of language' that could rationalise communication in line with revolutionary goals. Poets and novelists contributed by creating new idioms and rhythms that broke with the past and projected the future. Yet these decades also revealed the dangers of turning language into a political weapon. Intellectual freedom narrowed as Stalinist bureaucracy tightened its grip. Debates about how language should be studied—whether through empirical science, Marxist theory, or ideological dogma—often ended with denunciations and purges. Linguists such as Polivanov, who argued that language changed slowly and resisted sudden revolutionary transformation, were accused of betrayal. Marrism, a doctrine that saw language as a product of class struggle, rose to

prominence, only to collapse later under Stalin's own intervention. What began as vibrant debate hardened into orthodoxy, and innovation gave way to repetition. The consequences of this shift were profound. In the 1920s, Soviet linguistics anticipated what would later become Western sociolinguistics, exploring how language interacted with society, ideology, and identity. By the 1930s, however, isolation and bureaucratisation had curtailed this dynamism. Instead of developing nuanced theories that could adapt to social change, Soviet linguistics became rigid, a reflection of the broader stagnation that would eventually contribute to the system's decline. The revolutionary energy that had once animated the construction of a new language was replaced by cautious conformity. Comparisons with the West highlight this divergence. While Soviet linguistics became dogmatic, Western scholars such as Noam Chomsky developed new paradigms, and Western states harnessed language strategically through mass media, advertising, and Hollywood. Language in the West became a vehicle for soft power, shaping global opinion and consumer culture. The Soviet Union, once at the forefront of sociological approaches to language, fell behind as its intellectual climate narrowed. Yet it must be remembered that without the initial creation of a new Russian language suited to communist ideology, the Soviet state might not have survived its earliest crises. The forging of slogans, the reworking of grammar, the invention of political jargon, and the promotion of new literary forms all helped manufacture consent and unify the former imperial lands under a new civil contract. The Bolsheviks knew, as the Jacobins had before them, that revolutions are not secured by bayonets alone but by words that give meaning to sacrifice and promise a different future. The years 1917 to 1938 were therefore decisive. Language was reshaped not only in its official, legal, and political forms but also in literature, poetry, journalism, and slang. Every utterance became a sign of loyalty or resistance, every phrase a weapon in the struggle for power. The linguistic revolution did not end with the Stalinist turn to conservatism; its traces persisted in the cadences of Soviet propaganda and in the very vocabulary of everyday speech. The Soviet experiment endured not because it silenced opposition alone but because it succeeded, at least for a time, in creating a language in which millions could imagine themselves as part of a new society. In conclusion, Michael G. Smith in 'The Tenacity of Forms: Language, Nation, Stalin' shows that Stalin treated language as both a philosophical form and a political instrument, seeing it as central to the creation, cohesion, and survival of nations. For Stalin, language was neither fixed nor accidental but a historical force shaping identity and power, capable of uniting a multi-ethnic state while reflecting broader social transformations. While the Soviets bent Russian into the steel of revolution, the West was already moulding English into velvet chains—softer, subtler, but no less binding.

The Russian Menace

The image of Russia in the Western imagination has always hovered between fear and parody. In the 1966 American film 'The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming', the supposed threat of invasion was mocked as clumsy, almost comic. Yet behind such satire lies a deeper mythology: Russia as a perpetual menace, a force that unsettles Europe and America alike. Central to this mythology is not only Russian armies or geopolitics but the Russian language itself. For centuries, the Russian alphabet, literature, and discourse have been treated as markers of cultural power and military ambition, symbols of a vast civilisation that endures collapse and re-emerges with renewed strength. Language has always been at the core of Russian influence. Like English, French, Spanish, and Chinese, Russian is a global tongue spoken by millions across borders, often by communities that are politically hostile to Moscow.

Former Soviet republics continue to use Russian in business, science, or daily communication, even when their governments oppose Russian policies. This paradox—opponents of Russia still bound to it through language—gives Russian a unique geopolitical weight. The survival of Russian as a lingua franca across Eurasia is itself a form of power, a reminder that the menace is not only military but cultural, carried in words and scripts that cross borders regardless of politics. In the digital age this influence has only deepened. Despite sanctions and isolation following the invasion of Ukraine, the Russian internet has flourished with its own platforms, from social networks to video-sharing sites. Russian remains one of the most widely used languages online, with vast communities producing and consuming content. This creates a parallel digital world in which Russian discourse continues to thrive independently of Western structures. Far from silencing Russia, sanctions have reinforced the centrality of the Russian language to its cultural ecosystem. The strength of this language rests not only on its official use but on its literary tradition. From Pushkin to Dostoevsky, Russian literature has been a pillar of cultural dominance. Even when critical of the ruling power, Russian novels and plays have served to reinforce the stature of the language itself. Dostoevsky's complex, double-layered works explored corruption, injustice, and spiritual crisis within tsarist Russia, often in dialogue with figures of authority such as Konstantin Pobedonostsev. Yet his critiques did not weaken the Russian state; they strengthened Russian culture by proving the language capable of bearing truth in all its darkness. Honest writing, even when depicting ugly realities, expanded the expressive capacity of the Russian tongue and deepened its global influence. This pattern has continued into modern Russia. Viktor Pelevin's 1999 novel 'Generation P' satirised the absurdities of post-Soviet consumerism, mocking the manipulative power of advertising and digital spectacle. The film adaptation of the book shows a former taxi driver who resembles Vladimir Putin being elevated to the presidency by an all-powerful media industry, which manufactures reality through commercials, staged events, and doctored clips. Both the novel and its film adaptation ridicule the mechanisms of control in contemporary Russia, yet their effect was not to undermine the Russian language but to expand it. By expressing satire, critique, and irony through Russian, Pelevin reinforced the resilience of the language itself. Just as Dostoevsky had transformed critique into cultural strength in the nineteenth century, Pelevin did so for the digital age. This paradox points to the secret of the so-called Russian menace. It is not only armies or missiles that give Russia its aura of menace but the power of its language to convey 'pravda', the truth. In Russian culture, truth is not necessarily beautiful or comforting; it is often harsh, ugly, and painful. Yet it compels recognition. Even in criticism, the Russian language binds together its speakers, offering them a shared vocabulary to express suffering, injustice, and survival. Slogans and clichés may fade, but novels, poems, and satires endure, ensuring that Russian remains a medium of cultural cohesion and identity. The endurance of the Russian language across centuries of upheaval—from the fall of the tsars, through the rise and collapse of the Soviet Union, to the turbulence of the modern Federation—demonstrates its role as an anchor of national survival. While political regimes have come and gone, Russian continues to unify communities, transmit traditions, and project influence. Today, as sanctions attempt to isolate Moscow, Russian-language networks and platforms only reinforce its presence. Writers and thinkers, whether supporting or opposing the Kremlin, still strengthen the language simply by using it to tell stories that resonate with millions. The mythology of menace in the West may exaggerate or satirise Russia, but it rests on a real foundation. The Cyrillic alphabet, the cadences of Russian speech, the weight of its literature—all these elements sustain a cultural presence that outlives political collapse. Russia's ability to survive defeat and reassert itself lies not only in force but in words. The Russian language, capable of bearing satire, tragedy, and 'pravda', ensures that even in times of weakness Russia remains a

power that cannot be ignored. The menace, then, is not only external but internal: the truth-telling power of a language that refuses silence. Whether through Dostoevsky's dark visions, Pelevin's satirical mockery, or the endless debates of the digital era, Russian continually transforms critique into strength. This is why the West continues to view it with fascination and suspicion. The Russian menace is not only geopolitical; it is linguistic, a voice that survives collapse, speaks through critique, and endures as long as millions continue to call it their own tongue. In conclusion, Russia's persistent use of its language as both a cultural bond and a political instrument underscores how deeply linguistic identity shapes its geopolitical ambitions, with actions such as the 2014 annexation of Crimea framed as the defence of Russian speakers. In the West today, the perceived threat of 'Russian disinformation' often looms larger than the threat of Russian tanks, leading to the banning of Russian media outlets in the name of protecting Western audiences from dangerous Russian rhetoric.

Civil Cold War online

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the global agenda once again placed language and communication at the centre of political struggle. In these upheavals, the power of writing, printing, and broadcasting to mobilise opinion and legitimise action was unmistakable. Just as in the First and Second World Wars, propaganda became a decisive weapon, manipulating words to unite or divide, to inspire or to terrify. The systematic manufacture of consent and dissent, once conducted through newspapers and radio, has in the digital age been relocated to the Internet. Language has always been a battlefield, but in the twenty-first century it is transformed into a global arena in which the medium is immediate, borderless, and endlessly amplified. During the Cold War, the ideological clash was conducted largely between two languages: English and Russian. Each represented a worldview, a system of values, a model of society. The divide was clear, and propaganda was designed to convince not only domestic populations but also neutral states about the superiority of one bloc over the other. Today that binary contest has vanished. English has become the dominant language online, functioning as the medium for global communication, scholarship, commerce, and culture. This shift has produced an unexpected result: the Cold War has become a civil war. No longer are rival languages clashing across borders. Instead, the struggle takes place within English itself, as opposing ideologies, movements, and factions fight over meaning inside a single linguistic domain. The consequence is that English-speaking societies now experience the most intense effects of online propaganda. When English is the territory, the war is fought at home. Filter bubbles and echo chambers divide populations into mutually hostile camps. Words that once aimed to build consensus are now employed to fracture it. Propaganda in this new form does not seek to win hearts and minds against an external foe, but to turn neighbours, colleagues, and even family members into adversaries. The Cold War lines of East and West have dissolved into the fragmented geographies of social media timelines, hashtags, and online communities. This transformation reveals the persistence of old propaganda strategies under new conditions. The divide-and-rule principle, once practised by empires, now governs cyberspace. Where once empires sought to maintain authority by pitting groups against one another, now digital platforms achieve the same result by feeding users selectively curated content. Conflict is no longer an accidental by-product of political discourse but the very fuel of the attention economy. The more divided a society, the more engagement is generated. In this sense, dissent is

manufactured not as a temporary state but as a permanent condition of digital life. The ideological function of language has also changed. In the Cold War, propaganda in English aimed at presenting democracy as a unified and rational system in contrast to the authoritarian rigidity of its rival. Today, democratic discourse itself appears fragmented, distorted by algorithms and polarised by competing narratives. Consent, once the goal of political language in liberal societies, has been replaced by an endless manufacture of dissent. Public communication has shifted from deliberation to confrontation, from reasoned exchange to performative outrage. The digital public sphere resembles less a forum of debate than a battlefield of rhetorical skirmishes. This development has profound consequences for democracy. Representative government requires a shared language of trust, mutual recognition, and at least provisional agreement on facts. When language becomes distorted into weaponised propaganda, agreement becomes impossible. Online propaganda destabilises democracies from within, eroding confidence in institutions and polarising populations into irreconcilable camps. The Cold War once placed pressure on governments to prove their systems could deliver stability and prosperity. The civil Cold War online places pressure on them merely to preserve the possibility of dialogue itself. Historical theories of communication remain indispensable for understanding this crisis. Walter Lippmann described the manufacture of consent, while Jürgen Habermas analysed systematically distorted communication. In both cases, language was seen as central to power: either enabling citizens to support authority or allowing elites to manipulate the public. Today, these models must be revised to account for a situation in which the dominant function of language online is not unity but division. The Internet has institutionalised dissent as its organising principle. The English language, in which these battles are overwhelmingly conducted, is no longer a neutral medium but the very terrain of war. The consequences are not limited to political discourse. Online propaganda shapes identities, lifestyles, and communities. People now derive their sense of belonging through opposition to perceived enemies, whether ideological, cultural, or generational. The digital world fosters what might be called a perpetual Cold War of identities, fought not between states but within societies. In this sense the global dominance of English intensifies rather than reduces conflict, because it ensures that divergent movements and voices confront one another within a single communicative system. The transformation from Cold War to civil war online is therefore not only political but linguistic. The collapse of the old bilingual contest has not produced peace but a multiplication of internal battles. English, the triumphant language of the twentieth century, has become the site of its own undoing. The war of words has turned inward, destabilising the very societies that once claimed victory in the Cold War. In conclusion, the ideological Cold War has migrated from a contest between English and Russian into a civil Cold War fought within English itself. The Internet, far from uniting humanity through a common language, has become a machine for division, manufacturing dissent through filter bubbles and propaganda. The battlefield is no longer external; the battlefield is the language itself. English won the Cold War, only to discover that its victory transformed it into the territory of a new civil war.

Need for a New Paradigm

The emergence of the "manufacture of dissent" model on the Internet is a result of changes in the global communication system and a fundamental misunderstanding of the new principles

governing communication. In the 21st century, the communication landscape has transformed significantly, marked by the decentralization of information centers and the breakdown of the hierarchical structures that once dominated the dissemination of information. The old paradigm—where a central authority filtered and transmitted information from one point to the masses—is no longer relevant. This disconnect between the old methods of communication and the realities of the Internet contributes to dysfunctions in national systems and generates tensions and conflicts within societies. The crisis in many democracies can be traced back to this growing gap between outdated communication models and the current digital reality.

In 2013, Dennis McQuail published his article "Reflections on Paradigm Change in Communication Theory and Research." In it, McQuail addressed concerns about the connection between communication research, power, and business, and pointed out the custom-driven nature of communication studies. He highlighted the lack of a unified theory, clear principles, and a well-defined path for development. McQuail asked fundamental questions about the future of communication research: Why is a paradigm shift necessary? What would be gained from such a change, and is it something we should seek as an end in itself? McQuail suggested that, despite concerns, there seems to be little push for change. Media merchants, politicians, and the audience all appear content with the current state of affairs. Media thrives on the consumption of sensationalized news, politicians successfully shape opinions on a global scale, and audiences remain entertained. Communication science, at least in terms of research output, appears healthy. Yet, according to McQuail, change is happening, even if we struggle to articulate it in new theories or concepts. The Internet has fundamentally altered perceptions of communication, turning it into a broader social phenomenon. The 20th-century communication paradigm was based on the ability of advertisers and propagandists to reach vast audiences simultaneously, fostering the illusion of a homogeneous crowd. This paradigm assumed that messages could be universal, bypassing local culture, ideology, and political or familial ties. It relied on the belief that communication could exert control from a central source, leading to predictable, conformist behaviors. But today, with the rise of the Internet, communication is no longer about the efficient transmission of information from one point to another; rather, it is about the creation of new communities, divided into groups by shared interests or ideologies.

In the digital era, communication's role has shifted from merely transporting information to transforming human communities. These transformations naturally involve conflict and disagreement between different groups. The old paradigm, which assumed centralized control and predictability, is no longer viable. Communication is now defined by interaction, group dynamics, and the simultaneous creation of consent and dissent. This leads to the question: How do we address this transformation in our communication theories? Instead of focusing on technical information transmission, we need to consider communication's role in shaping and reshaping communities, relationships, and identities. A new communication paradigm began emerging in the late 20th century, characterized by multiple channels, diversity, interactivity, and decentralization. According to McQuail, the key features of this paradigm include the following:

- Interactivity and the exchange of messages, meanings, and roles.

- Open access to communication channels for sending and receiving information.
- Multimedia communication.
- Absence of central control over information delivery and selection.
- Unlimited data capacity.
- Removal of territorial limitations (communication is no longer tied to place).
- Constantly shifting control and content.

This paradigm shift is driven by the transition from an industrial to an information society, which raises questions about the basic principles of liberal democracy. The old understanding of communication as a neutral transmission of information is inadequate for today's digital age. Instead, communication is now seen as a form of power and control, with language, writing, and printing used to both unite and divide. McQuail notes that the new communication paradigm seeks to create shared meaning, forming communities based on common values. However, this shift also brings side effects. The focus on manipulating groups and shaping opinions through language and communication can lead to the fragmentation of society. The "divide and rule" model, applied through communication technologies, results in social fragmentation, undermining the cohesion that traditional communication once fostered. The rise of phenomena like "fake news," "post-truth," and "alternative facts" are byproducts of this distorted communication model. Despite these negative effects, Internet technologies also provide unprecedented opportunities to study and understand the consequences of mass communication. However, the elites who benefit from these systems may not have an interest in addressing these problems, preferring to use new technologies for their own ends.

The 21st century has seen a renewed focus on studying the effects of communication, with a shift from theoretical models to empirical research. McQuail stresses that traditional views of mass communication are no longer sufficient. The idea of a homogenous audience is being replaced by an understanding of audiences as complex, self-determining communities. While the total power of mass communication has been challenged, the idea that communication can be used to manufacture consent and dissent remains relevant.

The Internet has revolutionized the way audiences are understood. It allows for real-time monitoring and data collection, revealing that audiences are far more dynamic and interactive than previously thought. This realization has led to a new approach to communication research that emphasizes the importance of group dynamics, networks, and social influence. The old models of mass communication, focused on top-down messaging, are being replaced by models that recognize the fluid and interconnected nature of modern audiences. One of the key findings in this new research is the role of interpersonal communication in shaping public opinion. While traditional mass media still plays a role, people are increasingly influenced by their peers and the communities they are part of. This has profound implications for how communication is understood and practiced in the digital age. Today's audiences are no longer geographically localized or homogeneous. Social networks have created dispersed audiences that are connected

through shared interests, but these connections are often transient and surface-level. Roland Burkart, in his 1998 book "Communication Science," introduced the concept of the "dispersive audience," which describes groups that form around a common message but do not constitute a cohesive community. This type of audience has "non-public opinions" and is characterized by fleeting, impersonal connections. Dispersive audiences represent a new form of mass communication, one in which the traditional human community is replaced by networks of individuals. These audiences are not defined by personal relationships or long-term interactions; instead, they form around messages and media content. This raises important questions about the nature of communication and its ability to foster real, lasting communities. The Internet has blurred the lines between public and private communication, creating a space where personal, professional, and public discourse mix freely. Yet, as Burkart points out, true communication requires reciprocity and understanding, not just the transmission of information. In many cases, online communication is ritualistic and automatic, lacking the meaningful engagement that characterizes real human connection. The growing influence of groups and opinion leaders on the Internet has challenged the traditional power of mass media. Public trust in established media is declining, with individuals turning instead to charismatic leaders and peer networks for guidance. This shift underscores the need for new research into the motivations and effects of communication, especially as it relates to media manipulation and propaganda. Roland Burkart highlights the importance of understanding how audiences use media, rather than simply focusing on what the media does to audiences. This shift from a mechanistic view of communication to a more nuanced, empirical approach opens the door for new ways of studying the impact of media messages. Yet, traditional research methods are often inadequate for capturing the full range of social and cultural factors that influence communication.

The new communication paradigm emphasizes open, organic, and interactive communication. It recognizes that each participant in the communication process is both an author and an audience. In this dynamic, manipulation is still possible, but it is more subtle and often voluntarily accepted within the context of group loyalty and bias. This new understanding of communication, centered on the creation and dissolution of human communities, represents a significant departure from the old model of top-down messaging and media control. Yet, many of the negative effects of mass communication, including the manufacture of dissent, remain. New digital technologies offer powerful tools for monitoring and measuring communication processes, but these tools are often used by private interests for profit, rather than for the public good. The old paradigm of mass communication relied on creating a unified audience through the careful control of language and messaging. In contrast, the new paradigm focuses on creating divided, fragmented communities that are easier to control. The challenge for communication researchers today is to understand these new dynamics and develop a new theory of communication that accounts for the organized division of people through language, writing, and printing. The old model of mass communication, with its emphasis on transmitting information from a central authority to a passive audience, no longer works. Instead, communication must be understood as a ritual that creates and sustains communities, even as it divides them. The "manufacture of dissent" is a threat to this understanding, as it undermines the potential for genuine human connection and shared meaning. In the end, the new

communication paradigm offers both opportunities and challenges. It presents a chance to rethink how we use language, writing, and printing to shape societies, but it also raises concerns about the ways in which these tools are used to divide and control. The future of communication research lies in understanding these dynamics and finding ways to foster more equitable, participatory, and meaningful forms of communication in the digital age.

One of the most critical aspects of the new paradigm of communication is the role that language, writing, and printing play in uniting and dividing people to maintain control. Historically, language has always been a means of establishing power, from the early codification of laws in written form to the mass dissemination of ideas through printed texts. Official language has always served as both a tool of cohesion and division, enabling governments, institutions, and elites to unite populations around shared ideologies, while simultaneously marginalizing dissenters or alternative narratives. In the context of the new communication paradigm, this process has been amplified by the digital revolution, where the control over language and information is decentralized, but the effects of unification and division are more pronounced. The principle of uniting and dividing people through language is as old as civilization itself. When writing first emerged, it allowed early states and empires to solidify their control by recording laws, property rights, and religious texts. These written codes brought people together under a common understanding of social order, while also defining who was excluded from power and participation. The invention of printing in the 15th century further magnified this dynamic by enabling the mass production of texts, such as religious pamphlets, legal documents, and, eventually, newspapers, which became the basis for shared knowledge and identity. At the same time, writing and printing were used to divide. Official languages were often chosen over local dialects, creating a linguistic barrier that excluded large segments of the population from full participation in civic life. This divide allowed elites to maintain control by creating a distinct language of power, while relegating the masses to ignorance or submission. In many ways, language, writing, and printing became the ultimate instruments of control—tools for shaping not just political boundaries, but the very thoughts and beliefs of populations. In the digital era, this process of uniting and dividing through language has accelerated. The Internet, as a global communication platform, offers unprecedented access to information, but it also divides people into echo chambers based on shared ideologies, beliefs, and values. The sheer volume of information and the fragmented nature of digital communication mean that individuals and groups often gravitate towards the content that aligns with their pre-existing views, reinforcing divisions rather than fostering unity.

Manufacture of Consent and Dissent

The concepts of "manufacturing consent" and "manufacturing dissent" have become central to understanding the entropy of language and communication in contemporary civilization. The idea that language, writing, and printing can be used to shape public opinion is not new. However, the ways in which these tools are now used to both create unity and foster division have taken on new dimensions in the digital age. In essence, the entropy of language and

communication refers to the gradual breakdown of a unified social narrative into fragmented, competing narratives that create division and, ultimately, societal chaos.

Manufacturing consent, as famously discussed by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, refers to the process by which elites control public discourse by framing issues in ways that promote their interests while excluding alternative viewpoints. In the past, this was done primarily through the control of printed media—newspapers, books, and official documents that were carefully curated to reflect the dominant ideology. The Internet, however, has complicated this process. While traditional media still play a significant role in shaping public discourse, the digital age has opened up new avenues for alternative voices, making the control of consent more difficult. This is where the manufacture of dissent comes into play. In the new paradigm, the goal is often not to unite people around a common narrative, but to divide them into opposing factions, each with its own language, values, and worldview. By fostering division, elites can maintain control over fragmented populations that are too busy fighting among themselves to challenge the structures of power. The Internet, with its vast array of platforms for communication, has become the perfect breeding ground for this strategy. Language, writing, and printing, in their digital forms, are used to create dissent by amplifying differences, spreading disinformation, and encouraging conflict. The entropy of language and communication is therefore the result of this dual process of manufacturing consent and dissent. As language becomes more fragmented and less anchored to a shared reality, the possibility of meaningful dialogue and understanding diminishes. What emerges is a form of communication that is increasingly about reinforcing group identities and antagonisms rather than fostering mutual understanding or cooperation.

The Crisis of Trust in Language and Communication

One of the most profound effects of the new paradigm is the erosion of trust in language and communication itself. In the past, official documents, printed texts, and even spoken language were seen as reliable sources of truth and authority. The rise of disinformation, fake news, and algorithm-driven content on the Internet has shattered this trust. Language, once the foundation of shared understanding and social cohesion, has become a battleground for competing truths. This breakdown of trust is central to the concept of communication entropy. As language loses its capacity to convey universally accepted truths, society becomes more fragmented. People retreat into linguistic and ideological silos, where they no longer trust the words or ideas of those outside their group. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle of division, where the very act of communication becomes a source of conflict rather than a means of resolution. The consequences for civilization are profound. In previous eras, the unifying power of language, writing, and printing helped to create stable social orders, even if they were hierarchical or exclusionary. In the digital age, the fragmentation of language threatens the very foundations of social order. As trust in language breaks down, so too does trust in the institutions that rely on it—governments, legal systems, educational systems, and even cultural institutions.

The Role of Elites and Digital Capitalism in the New Paradigm

The new communication paradigm is not just the result of technological change. It is also shaped by the interests of elites, particularly those in control of digital platforms and communication technologies. Digital capitalism, as it is often called, thrives on division. The

business models of many social media platforms, for example, are based on maximizing user engagement, which is often achieved by promoting content that polarizes and divides. Elites use language, writing, and printing—now in their digital forms—to maintain control by manipulating the flow of information. They manufacture consent when it serves their interests, but they are equally adept at manufacturing dissent when division is more advantageous. This dual strategy ensures that no single narrative or movement can gain enough traction to challenge the status quo. The result is a communication landscape defined by conflict, division, and entropy.

Towards a New Understanding of Communication

To address the challenges of the new paradigm, it is necessary to rethink our approach to communication. The old model, which focused on the transmission of information from one point to another, no longer applies in a world where communication is about creating and sustaining communities—however fragmented they may be. In the new paradigm, the goal should not be to return to a time when communication was tightly controlled by a central authority. Instead, the challenge is to find ways to restore trust in language and foster more inclusive and meaningful forms of dialogue. This requires a recognition that communication is not just about transmitting information but about shaping identities, values, and relationships. Ultimately, the future of communication lies in our ability to navigate the tension between unity and division, between consent and dissent. Only by understanding the role that language, writing, and printing play in these processes can we begin to address the entropy of language, communication, and civilization.

Rise of Dissent in the Network Society

The advent of the Internet, particularly with the emergence of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s, marked the beginning of a transformation in how humans communicate and organize themselves. This shift is not merely the development of a new form of media, but a fundamental change in how language, writing, and printing function as tools for uniting, dividing, and controlling people. Language, traditionally used to create cohesion within societies, has now become a powerful mechanism for both unification and division, particularly in the online world. The principles of "unite/divide and control" and "manufacture consent and dissent" are central to understanding the entropy of language, communication, and civilization in this new era.

The Rise of Dissent in the Network Society

The emergence of Web 2.0, often associated with the 2004 Web 2.0 Summit in San Francisco, signaled a new phase in which individuals are free to create and share information without traditional intermediaries. This evolution of the Internet was revolutionary because it allowed consumers to become creators, undermining the traditional hierarchical structures of language and communication. The Internet, unlike older forms of media such as books, newspapers, radio, and television, is a network in which information is semantically interconnected and constantly evolving. With this shift, the role of official language—long used as a tool to unite people within a nation-state or to enforce social order—has been fundamentally altered. The Internet's decentralized nature enables the creation of multiple, often competing languages of power, each representing different ideological, cultural, or political groups. While official languages once helped to unify citizens under a common identity, the Internet has democratized

communication, making language a battleground for control over the meaning of truth, identity, and belonging.

"Mediocratia" and the Fragmentation of Opinion

The Internet has amplified the process of disintermediation, which in an economic sense refers to cutting out the middleman. In the realm of communication, this has led to the bypassing of traditional media institutions that once served as the gatekeepers of public discourse. As individuals can now create their channels of communication, the role of official language in unifying public opinion has weakened. This has resulted in a phenomenon where people form their own opinions within isolated virtual communities, creating what might be termed a "non-public opinion" that exists primarily in these digital echo chambers rather than in the public sphere of the nation-state. This fragmentation of opinion online creates an environment of constant disagreement, where the unity once fostered by shared language and national identity is replaced by division. The Internet, by its very design, encourages dissent rather than agreement. As people become more aware of the differences between themselves and others, the Internet promotes individualism and narcissism, often at the expense of collective social bonds. The principle of "divide and rule" is now applied in cyberspace, where individuals are encouraged to form small, insular groups that are easily manipulated by external forces, such as digital corporations or political actors. In this environment, the process of manufacturing dissent becomes a powerful tool of control. Online platforms, driven by algorithms designed to maximize user engagement, thrive on conflict and controversy. Anger, fear, and outrage are profitable emotions in the digital economy, and the media's traditional role of informing and uniting citizens is increasingly replaced by a model that promotes division. The maxim "angry people click more" perfectly encapsulates the economic incentives that drive the Internet's role in fostering dissent.

The Role of Language in Division and Control

In the network society, language is not simply a tool for communication; it is also a means of control. Official languages, which once helped to establish national identities and social cohesion, are now just one of many competing forces in the digital landscape. The Internet allows for the creation of new, often oppositional languages that reflect different ideological or political positions. These languages are used to both unite people within specific virtual communities and to divide them from others. This process of uniting and dividing through language is central to the manufacture of dissent. Online, individuals and groups often define themselves in opposition to others, using language to mark the boundaries between "us" and "them." The ease with which people can form new groups and create new languages of dissent makes it difficult to achieve any kind of lasting social consensus. The Internet, in this sense, is a space where language is constantly breaking down into smaller and smaller fragments, each representing a different perspective or identity. As a result, the Internet fosters a culture of dissent where agreement is rare and division is the norm. The traditional role of official language in unifying people around a shared national or cultural identity is undermined by the sheer diversity of voices online. While this might seem like a triumph of individual freedom, it also creates a new form of social control. Digital platforms, through their algorithms and business models, encourage the formation of small, divided groups that can be easily manipulated for commercial or political gain.

Manufacturing Consent and Dissent in the Digital Age

The principles of "manufacture consent" and "manufacture dissent," as discussed by thinkers like Noam Chomsky and Walter Lippmann, take on new meanings in the digital age. The Internet, as a decentralized communication platform, has made it much more difficult for elites to control public opinion through traditional means. However, this has not diminished the power of those in control of digital platforms; instead, it has shifted the focus from manufacturing consent to manufacturing dissent. Manufacturing consent, in the traditional sense, involves shaping public opinion to align with the interests of those in power. This was often done through the use of official language in media, government, and education, which promoted a unified narrative that served the status quo. In the digital age, however, the goal is often not to create unity but to foster division. By promoting dissent, elites can keep populations fragmented and distracted, making it easier to maintain control. This strategy is particularly effective in the online world, where people are encouraged to identify with small, insular groups rather than with broader social or political movements. This shift from consent to dissent as the primary tool of control represents a significant change in how language functions in society. Where official language once served as a unifying force, it is now one of many competing languages used to divide people. The entropy of language, communication, and civilization is therefore a process in which meaning becomes increasingly fragmented and the possibility of social unity becomes more elusive.

The Crisis of Trust in Language and Communication

One of the most significant consequences of the new communication paradigm is the erosion of trust in language itself. In the past, official language—whether in the form of government decrees, religious texts, or printed media—was seen as a reliable source of truth and authority. The rise of disinformation, fake news, and algorithm-driven content on the Internet has shattered this trust. Language, once the foundation of shared understanding, has become a source of confusion and conflict. This breakdown of trust in language is central to the concept of communication entropy. As language fragments into competing dialects and ideologies, it loses its power to create shared meaning. Instead, language becomes a tool for reinforcing divisions, as people retreat into isolated communities where they only engage with those who share their views. This creates a feedback loop of division, where communication itself becomes a source of conflict rather than a means of understanding.

The Role of Elites in the New Paradigm

In the new communication paradigm, the role of elites—those who control digital platforms and shape the flow of information—is critical. These elites use language, writing, and digital technologies to manufacture dissent, not unity. By encouraging division and conflict, they ensure that no single group or narrative can gain enough power to challenge the status quo. Digital capitalism, driven by the need to maximize engagement and profits, thrives on division. The more fragmented and divided society becomes, the more opportunities there are for commercial and political exploitation. The elites who control digital platforms use language as a tool to divide people, creating echo chambers and filter bubbles that reinforce existing beliefs and prevent meaningful dialogue.

Toward a New Understanding of Communication

To address the challenges of the new paradigm, we must rethink our approach to language and communication. The old model, which focused on the transmission of information from one point to another, no longer applies in a world where communication is about creating and

sustaining communities, however fragmented they may be. In the new paradigm, the goal should not be to return to a time when language was tightly controlled by a central authority. Instead, we must find ways to restore trust in language and foster more inclusive and meaningful forms of dialogue. This requires recognizing that communication is not just about transmitting information but about shaping identities, values, and relationships. The future of communication lies in navigating the tension between unity and division, between consent and dissent. Only by understanding how language, writing, and printing are used to unite and divide people can we begin to address the entropy of language, communication, and civilization. This process will require new forms of communication that prioritize trust, mutual understanding, and the creation of shared meaning, even in a world where division is the norm.

"New World Information Order" Dystopia

Digital platforms and advanced technologies for information archiving and analysis have enabled the creation of a comprehensive map of global communication processes. A new "atlas" of the global information order is emerging, revealing significant levels of information inequality. This inequality is systematic and progressive, sustained by a comprehensive system of global information distribution. What we are witnessing could be described as a new form of information totalitarianism. When communication is reduced to mere transmission, it serves primarily to convey impersonal orders and commands. However, in the evolving communication paradigm, reciprocity and shared understanding replace commands. This shift challenges the power of traditional hierarchical systems, weakening their ability to maintain control. Communication, when viewed as the process of sustaining communities of informed and equal individuals, fosters reciprocity, trust, creativity, and social progress. In this model, communication becomes the foundation of equality in both awareness and the distribution of knowledge.

Information Inequality

In the 1970s, during several meetings organized by UNESCO and the "Non-Aligned Movement," the concept of a "New World Information and Communication Order" (NWICO) was developed. In 1977, UNESCO's Secretary-General Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow commissioned Nobel Peace Prize winner Sean MacBride to lead the "International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems." In 1981, the commission published the landmark "MacBride Report," officially titled "Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow, Many Voices One World: Towards a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order." This report provided an insightful analysis of global communication challenges at the end of the 20th century. It advocated for the creation of a new, more equitable and open communication network, emphasizing that access to information and the ability to communicate with others who share common interests are critical to social progress. The report argued that this must be a priority for the international community, including UNESCO and the United Nations. The MacBride Report highlighted the dangers of dominance in communication and power centralization, identifying these factors as major sources of both social and information inequality. Information inequality and limited opportunities for communication lead to social apathy and helplessness, preventing individuals and communities across the world from fully realizing their potential. Many Voices One World warned of the risks posed by concentrated "information power" and the potential dysfunction of communication systems. It foresaw that new technologies might solidify these communication systems, exacerbating their

imbalances and dysfunctions. Media monopolies, it argued, could further entrench inequality, promoting irresponsibility and a sense of helplessness among the public.

In 1980, the MacBride Report recommended the establishment of a global information bank, a network of computers connected in what we now know as the Internet. This was not the stuff of science fiction, but a concrete recommendation in an official UNESCO report, authored by global communication specialists, including representatives from both the United States and the Soviet Union. One of the commission's most well-known members was Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The report paid particular attention to the risks associated with restricting access to information in poorer countries, warning that this could increase dependence and threaten national sovereignty. The MacBride Report emphasized the need for ethical guidelines in new information technologies, arguing that computers—like any other tool—could serve as either a "master or servant." If left unchecked, computers could exacerbate issues of power and inequality, reinforcing hierarchies, bureaucracies, and centralization. However, they also had the potential to democratize communication, making it more accessible, spontaneous, and open, and protecting diversity in decision-making.

The MacBride Commission delivered a rare example of global cooperation, issuing a timely warning about the social and moral consequences of digital media. The commission stressed the need for humanizing mass communication, replacing large, passive audiences with networks of interconnected individuals. This communication equality, it argued, would dismantle systems of power and control, allowing for genuine interpersonal communication on a global scale. The report advocated for universal understanding, suggesting that people have no choice but to communicate openly and work toward a shared understanding of each other. A key point raised by the MacBride Report was the absence of official media channels for international organizations like the United Nations. These organizations relied on external media, thus mediating their communication with the public. This reliance on intermediaries, the report suggested, gave media monopolies dangerous international power, making it difficult to achieve balance in global understanding and peace. The report argued that only free, open communication could empower the public to directly influence policymaking. The MacBride Report's central argument was that a new global communication system could help create an "International Public Opinion," a step toward building a global community of nations. Instead of manufacturing consent through elite-controlled mass media, people themselves would reach agreement on key issues. Establishing the conditions for this international public opinion, the report argued, was critical for lasting peace and understanding. The UN, the report suggested, should consider developing an auxiliary global information system that could amplify this international public voice.

The Paradox of an Independent Global Communication System

In 1980, the MacBride Report identified a paradox: the international community lacked its own independent global communication system, despite the obvious need for one. The commission was surprised that such a system, democratically controlled and capable of serving the needs of the entire world, did not already exist. The creation of this system was not simply a matter of technology or political will; it was a matter of establishing a new moral framework. The report emphasized the importance of forming alliances and partnerships with existing media to create this system. Without such a foundation, it argued, new ethical values and principles could not emerge. Today, the ideals behind the MacBride Report live on, manifesting spontaneously in various aspects of Internet culture. The desire for a new moral order is evident in the way some

organizations promote the free and equitable dissemination of information. This gives hope that the vision of the MacBride Report and UNESCO's recommendations may yet be realized. However, the challenges to implementing such a system remain substantial.

International Public Opinion

Another key issue raised by the MacBride Report was the risk that media could impose a specific, elite-driven opinion on the public, fostering apathy and undermining democracy. The mass media's ability to construct a "non-public" opinion that served particular interests ran contrary to democratic ideals, which rely on open discussion and the clash of ideas to produce consensus. While the media could provide information that was beyond individuals' direct experience, the report insisted that public opinion should be formed through consensus among the people, not dictated by external forces. The imposition of top-down media narratives created apathy, which in turn weakened the democratic process. True public opinion, in a democracy, must arise from informed discussions and genuine attempts at mutual understanding. However, despite the proliferation of the Internet, global public opinion still does not exist. Even on critical issues like climate change or vaccination, a worldwide consensus remains elusive. This failure to reach agreement stems in part from the entrenched interests of countries that dominate global information flows. The divide and rule strategy remains effective, and the status quo has little incentive to alter the communication system. Another significant barrier to creating global public opinion is the lack of a media entity representing the United Nations. Media outlets play a key role in forming public opinion, yet international public opinion cannot emerge on its own. It must grow out of the convergence of national perspectives. Governments are increasingly attuned to both domestic and global opinion, but global opinion begins with shared consciousness and mutual sympathy between peoples, not the manufactured consent imposed from above. The MacBride Report advocated for global public opinion to be built through equal dialogue—a multidirectional flow of information between countries, groups, and individuals. Social networks on the Internet offer the potential for such communities, where individuals are in constant contact and engaged in dialogue. In this way, public opinion would develop organically, grounded in shared morality and human values. According to the MacBride Report, only the creation of a shared consciousness allows for legitimate judgment by the public, whose unity and consensus can bestow true legitimacy on governance. Any other form of power that lacks the support of a unified human society is ultimately unstable. The report's conclusion emphasized the importance of humane, democratic communication. Such communication would enable people to develop their full potential, recognizing individuals not as objects to be manipulated but as creators and agents of social progress. The goal of the New Information Order was to transform passive audiences into active participants, shaping their own lives and societies.

The Dream of the MacBride Report and the Resistance to Change

The MacBride Report's vision remains largely unrealized today, but some of its recommendations are beginning to take root, albeit in unexpected and spontaneous ways. The report is a testament to the challenges involved in altering established communication patterns of domination and power. Communication control remains a key pillar of financial and military power, making it difficult to bring about meaningful reform. A new global information order threatens the established dominance of Western countries and their control over global communication. Some of the MacBride Report's conclusions—such as eliminating information inequality, curbing monopolies, and fostering a free flow of news—were particularly unsettling

to the global establishment. Shortly after the report was published, a concerted media campaign against UNESCO began. In 1983, a New York Times article, "U.S. Is Quitting UNESCO, Affirms Backing for U.N.," quoted U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz, who accused UNESCO of serving Soviet propaganda interests. Schultz claimed that UNESCO had supported Soviet disarmament proposals and collectivist trends while undermining individual human rights. The U.S. government viewed UNESCO's promotion of a New World Information Order as a threat to Western economic and communication dominance. This pressure ultimately led the United States to withdraw from UNESCO in 1984, followed by Britain in 1986. This marked the end of the New World Information Order discussions, and the idea was largely forgotten. The entrenched power structures had successfully resisted any meaningful change to the global communication system, maintaining their hold on global information flows.

The Consequences of Communication Monopolies and the Emergence of the Internet

The lack of change in the global communication power model has led to the monopolization and homogenization of world culture. This has stifled the diversity of human creativity, as the possibilities for different cultures to produce new combinations of ideas and expressions are diminished. Instead, a global utilitarian culture has emerged, seeking to manufacture consent through standardized cultural models and stereotypes. This suppression of social creativity is precisely what the MacBride Report warned against—the transformation of individuals into passive audiences controlled by the ruling classes and their mass media. After the 1980s, the development of multinational media monopolies further solidified global control over information and communication. The world seemed to be heading toward a single, homogenized media culture, where everyone would look, think, and speak in the same way. However, this plan was disrupted by the rise of the Internet. The inherent freedom of digital technology created a global culture of dissent, making the old methods of manufacturing consent increasingly ineffective. The traditional elites were forced to adapt to a new era of chaotic and often hostile communication, where the old rules no longer applied.

Dysfunctions in the Propaganda Model

The term "manufacturing consent," widely known from the book by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, was originally coined by American journalist and media theorist Walter Lippmann. As one of the most influential authors in 20th-century public opinion research, Lippmann introduced the concept of the "manufacture of consent" as a global model for shaping public opinion in democracies through mass communication systems. This model is designed to foster agreement and unity within the large society of the state. It utilizes tools like propaganda, censorship, and manipulation but avoids overt violence or coercion. "Manufacturing consent" is only truly effective within an audience controlled by a unified media system that has common information channels. Before the advent of the Internet, official mass media dominated the public space and served as the intermediaries for all social communication. Society existed as it was portrayed by mass media, which in democratic contexts had the specific task of "manufacturing consent" even when such consensus did not naturally exist.

The Latent Dysfunction of Mass Communication

In his 1893 book *The Division of Labor in Society*, Émile Durkheim discusses the social functions of institutions, distinguishing between normal and pathological functions, although

these concepts may vary across different cultures. Continuing in this tradition, Robert Merton developed the functionalist approach to study social institutions, dividing social functions and dysfunctions into manifest and latent forms. The concept of "latent dysfunction in communication" aligns closely with Jürgen Habermas's idea of "systematically distorted communication" and Shannon and Weaver's notion of "communication entropy." The functionalist approach allows for the identification of these latent dysfunctions and sheds light on the processes of entropy within communication systems. The term "entropy" was first used in 1865 by German physicist Rudolf Clausius in the context of thermodynamics to describe the tendency of systems to move toward disorder and energy dissipation. In a closed system, entropy inevitably increases, leading to chaos. In 1949, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver introduced the concept of "entropy in communication" in their *Mathematical Theory of Communication*, which describes the level of predictability or expected information in communication.

When applied to communication systems, entropy is linked to latent dysfunction, as a closed system's entropy will always rise, reducing the amount of information transmitted and distorting communication. The process of manufacturing dissent, which fosters division within communication systems, is one manifestation of entropy—a form of communication chaos. While consent seeks to maintain order and stabilize the system, dissent generates instability and novelty, which in turn attracts attention. In the media landscape, chaos often proves profitable. In 1990, Meryl, Lee, and Friedlander argued that entropy in communication leads to a loss of information and efficiency, raising the question of whether media's goal is to inform and be efficient or merely to attract attention at any cost. The act of choosing one message over another begins the process of entropy, which is exacerbated with each new intervention. According to Meryl, Lee, and Friedlander, entropy in mass communication is unavoidable in any closed communication system. Disagreement within a closed communication system can only increase. This is evident in totalitarian states where censorship temporarily suppresses dissent, but when restrictions are relaxed, entropy quickly escalates. The only way to slow down the entropy in communication systems is to keep them as open as possible to diverse messages and information. The Internet, with its infinite virtual space and constant influx of new information, provides a unique technical possibility for minimizing entropy by allowing direct connections between individuals without intermediaries. However, as the global network of the Internet slows down entropy, closed national systems experience an increase in disorder. Sociologist Robert Merton linked the idea of entropy to "unintended consequences" and "latent dysfunction" in social systems, particularly in his 1936 article *The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action*. Merton warned that deliberate interventions in complex systems often lead to unforeseen and undesirable outcomes, a cautionary note for elites who believe they can fully control societal dynamics.

In *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Merton introduced the concept of "manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions" in communication. While manifest dysfunctions are expected, latent dysfunctions—those that produce unforeseen negative consequences—are far more dangerous to social equilibrium. Understanding these latent dysfunctions is key to maintaining social balance, and functional analysis helps detect the imbalances caused by the interactions within a communication system. Merton emphasized that societies are not necessarily functional for everyone, as seen in the case of apartheid in South Africa, where societal ideals failed to serve the black population. Functional communication systems should, at least ideally, strive to create unity and consent among all members of society. Merton also developed the

concept of the "net balance" to determine whether positive functions outweigh dysfunctions, although this assessment remains subjective. His idea of "middle-range theories" led to the analysis of specific communities at specific times, moving away from grand theories of society. While functional analysis has been criticized as conservative or reactionary, its focus on maintaining the stability of national communication systems highlights its importance in ensuring societal cohesion. However, when media functions are not aligned with the "public interest," the media itself gains the power to determine that interest, necessitating a critical approach to media activities.

The Propaganda 2.0 Online Media Model

In today's digital age, social networks on the Internet have come to represent society, with digital companies monopolizing the worldviews of consumers. The profitability of these companies is tied to Internet traffic, which skyrockets in times of conflict. The online media model of "angry people click more" systematically provokes moral outrage, leading to corporate profits but also social decline. Walter Lippmann distrusted the ability of the general public to develop reasonable and educated public opinion on their own. To him, the masses were a "bewildered herd" incapable of organizing or creating rational action plans. This responsibility fell to a well-educated elite, which would guide the masses through the media. Manipulation, according to Lippmann, was necessary for the democratic process but required a new theory of public opinion. Without such guidance, public opinion could become a tool for personal interests, leading to democratic crises and societal dysfunction. In contrast to this model, the total manipulation of public opinion is impossible in an online environment. The free flow of information and the ability to express any opinion present significant risks to liberal democracies, leading to a crisis in the communication systems of nation-states. Disinformation, fake news, and the manufacturing of dissent are critical issues requiring attention from media researchers. One of the pioneers in studying communication dysfunction in democratic societies was Walter Lippmann. His works, including *Public Opinion* (1922), *The Phantom Public* (1925), and *The Public Philosophy* (1955), explored the limits of democracy and the risks posed by unregulated public opinion. Lippmann argued that the "consent of the governed" was essential for legitimizing power, but this consent had to be "manufactured" through a media system linked to state power. When media are not under the control of a single, educated elite, information chaos and dissent prevail. The lack of monopoly over information leads to division, disagreement, and societal instability.

Before World War II, democratic propaganda and public opinion formation became major research topics in the United States, with figures like Edward Bernays and Harold Laswell building on Lippmann's ideas. Bernays, in works such as *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), *Propaganda* (1928), and *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), openly affirmed democratic propaganda as essential to the functioning of democracy. He argued for the "engineering of consent" and believed that revealing manipulation to the public could ultimately lead to a more educated and responsible citizenry. Bernays' ideas influenced propaganda development in Europe, notably in Nazi Germany. Joseph Goebbels studied American propaganda methods, and Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, a German journalist who briefly worked in Nazi propaganda, later developed the "spiral of silence" theory. In her book *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin* (1984), she explored how individuals' fear of isolation leads them to conform to majority opinions, a process exploited by propaganda. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman called this system the "Propaganda Model" of communication in their book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. This model successfully functioned in the

West until the rise of the Internet, which disrupted the controlled flow of information. The Internet's free and open communication model has revealed the limitations of traditional propaganda systems, while at the same time fostering new challenges, such as disinformation and the rise of digital dissent. In 1992, Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* declared the end of grand ideologies, which had traditionally united societies. The individualism of the 21st century, coupled with the rise of social networks, brought about a new era where mass "manufacturing of consent" became impossible. Instead, the model reversed, and individuals began to pursue personal and group goals in an environment characterized by distrust and disagreement. This marked the rise of Propaganda 2.0—an era defined not by the manufacturing of consent, but by the manufacturing of dissent.

Jamming The "Culture Jamming"

Culture jamming emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as a strategy of resistance against consumerism, mass media manipulation, and the emptying of language into slogans, logos, and propaganda. It began within avant-garde movements and countercultural art, only to be gradually absorbed by the very institutions of advertising, politics, and state power that it had sought to oppose. At its core, culture jamming exposes how language and words can be reduced to empty containers, endlessly filled and refilled to create, distort, and sabotage common meaning. What was once a tactic of subversive creativity has become a technique of governance, propaganda, and managed dissent. The genealogy of culture jamming can be traced back to Lettrism, founded in Paris in the mid-1940s by the Romanian immigrant Isidore Isou. Lettrism extended the experiments of Dada and Surrealism, movements that had already sought to dismantle the conventions of meaning in art and language. Isou and his collaborators believed that every cultural form passed through phases of growth until it reached exhaustion, and then required radical deconstruction. Out of this came the practice of hypergraphy, which sought to strip language of its phonetic values and open communication to the play of symbols, pictographs, and experimental arrangements. Hypergraphy disrupted the fixed relationship between sign and meaning, deliberately multiplying ambiguities and undermining the stability of shared codes. Though often confined to avant-garde circles, this principle of destabilising meaning through formal play foreshadowed later attempts to jam the dominant flows of communication. From Lettrism grew the Situationist International, founded in 1957, which fused Marxist theory with avant-garde practice.

The Situationists, led by Guy Debord, offered one of the most profound critiques of advanced capitalism through the notion of the spectacle: a social order in which lived experience had been replaced by images, commodities, and representations. For Debord, the spectacle was not merely a set of media images but the very logic of social life in late capitalism, where alienation was reproduced through the mediation of signs. The Situationists opposed this alienation with the construction of situations, deliberately created moments that might recover authentic desire and disrupt the spell of spectacle. Their most subversive tactic, however, was *détournement*, the hijacking or rerouting of existing cultural materials to expose their contradictions. A *détournement* could be as small as altering a comic strip or as large as repurposing a philosophical text; in both cases, the strategy was to turn the tools of the spectacle against itself. Out of *détournement* developed the broader practice of culture jamming. The term itself, coined by Don Joyce of the band Negativland in 1984, drew an analogy with radio jamming, where a frequency is disrupted by noise. In the cultural sphere, the dominant signals of mass media—

advertisements, slogans, corporate logos—were intercepted, distorted, and returned to public circulation in altered form. By appropriating the language of advertising and pushing it to absurd or critical extremes, culture jamming revealed the hollowness of the original messages and forced viewers into a double take. In this way, language became a weapon of disorientation, designed to puncture the smooth surface of consumer culture. One of the central practices of culture jamming was subvertising, the production of anti-ads that mimicked corporate imagery in order to reverse its message. A familiar logo could be slightly altered to expose exploitation, environmental destruction, or political corruption. Such interventions worked precisely because words and images were shown to be empty shells, their meanings dependent entirely on context.

The Canadian group Adbusters became the most influential promoter of subvertising, producing spoof ads, organising Buy Nothing Day, and popularising the concept of mental environmentalism—the idea that the human mind itself was being polluted by the toxic saturation of advertising. Their magazine sought to recycle the techniques of advertising, but for the purpose of liberating thought rather than colonising it. The effectiveness of culture jamming lay in its capacity to disrupt the taken-for-granted flow of meaning. A billboard altered by the Billboard Liberation Front or an ironic Nike slogan demanding attention to sweatshop labour forced people to re-evaluate the corporate control of everyday life. In these acts, meaning itself was shown to be unstable and manipulable, reminding audiences that language and culture were not fixed realities but contested terrains. Yet, precisely because culture jamming revealed the manipulability of signs, it also exposed itself to recuperation. What had begun as a weapon against consumerism was swiftly reabsorbed by the very system it critiqued. Advertisers learned to mimic the ironic style of subvertising, transforming rebellion into a marketing tool. Fashion campaigns adopted the aesthetics of critique to sell more products, staging fake disruptions that only reinforced the centrality of the brand. Political communication too began to borrow from culture jamming, using manufactured protests, staged controversies, and controlled dissent as ways of demonstrating vitality within systems of managed democracy. The philosopher Rick Roderick once captured this paradox with brutal clarity: if no one protests against war on television, then intelligence agencies will pay actors to protest, because without visible opposition, democracy itself would lose its image. Dissent must be manufactured, if necessary, to preserve the appearance of freedom. Here the logic of culture jamming had been fully inverted. Where once subversives hijacked media to expose lies, now the state and corporations hijacked dissent to inoculate themselves against genuine opposition. This transformation aligns with what legal scholars Cass Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule later called cognitive infiltration. Governments, they argued, should not simply rebut conspiracy theories but should infiltrate the groups that produce them, seeding doubts and fragmenting belief from within. The method mirrors the logic of culture jamming: disrupt meaning, insert confusion, jam the semantic network so that opposition collapses into disarray. The history of infiltration, from the FBI's activities against the Black Panthers to online disinformation campaigns in the digital age, shows how easily subversive tactics migrate into tools of domination.

The trial of the Panther 21, in which Afeni Shakur exposed an undercover agent's role in fabricating plots, remains a powerful reminder that infiltration is not merely surveillance but active manipulation, often designed to manufacture the very crimes it claims to prevent. Culture jamming thus stands as a perfect example of the ambiguity of language. Words and signs can be containers filled with any content; their meaning depends not on inherent truth but on how they are positioned within circuits of communication. When radicals jammed corporate messages, they exposed this emptiness and used it to resist domination. When corporations and

governments later adopted the same techniques, they confirmed the same emptiness and used it to consolidate control. The same play with signs can liberate or enslave, depending on who wields it. What began with Lettrist experiments in letters, Situationist *détournements* of mass culture, and countercultural pranks evolved into mainstream advertising campaigns, staged protests, and propaganda operations. Culture jamming reveals the instability of meaning but also its vulnerability to power. If signs can always be reprogrammed, then so too can dissent itself be scripted, rehearsed, and broadcast as a spectacle of opposition. The trajectory from Isou's hypergraphy to Adbusters' anti-ads to Sunstein's cognitive infiltration illustrates the fate of subversion in the age of spectacle: every disruption becomes content, every rebellion a new aesthetic, every protest a performance folded back into the system. In this sense, culture jamming is not only a practice of resistance but also a case study in the misuse of language and the inevitability of miscommunication. By showing that words are plastic containers, culture jamming makes it possible both to resist domination and to perpetuate it.

The power system, having absorbed the tactic, can now manage dissent by producing its own disruptions, ensuring that even rebellion serves the spectacle. What began as an attempt to free language from its capitalist colonisation ends by proving that language itself is always vulnerable to capture. Culture jamming began as a playful revolt against the manipulation of signs and became one more chapter in the history of how power learns to exploit the emptiness of language. If language can be hijacked, then so too can resistance. The final paradox is that the very act of jamming, once an emblem of freedom, can now be staged by the powerful as proof of democracy. In such a world, how can one tell whether dissent is genuine, or merely another advertisement for the system itself? Manufactured dissent is a conspicuous marker of the planned obsolescence of language.

Is There No Alternative?

Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009) analyzes how neoliberal capitalism has embedded itself so deeply in culture and consciousness that it appears as the only viable system. The book also explores the psychic, cultural, and linguistic consequences of this entrenchment. Below is a chapter-by-chapter summary of *Capitalist Realism*, connected to the theme of language decline and earlier relevant philosophical and cultural texts.

Chapter 1: It's Easier to Imagine the End of the World than the End of Capitalism

Fisher opens the book by addressing how capitalism has absorbed or neutralized dissent. He draws from Slavoj Žižek and Fredric Jameson to explain that cultural and political imagination has become limited to capitalist possibilities. This reflects the decline of a political language that could propose radical alternatives. Fisher references earlier theorists like Jean Baudrillard, whose work in the 1970s and 1980s showed how media and symbols have become complicit in this systemic domination. The chapter suggests that language has been instrumentalized to reinforce capitalist realism, erasing vocabulary that could describe transformative futures.

Chapter 2: What If You Held a Protest and Everyone Came?

Fisher discusses the rise of performative dissent, where protest movements, though widespread, lack real power to change the system. The language of political resistance has been co-opted and neutralized, becoming more symbolic than transformative. In connection with earlier texts, this relates to Antonio Gramsci's ideas of hegemony, where the dominant class controls the

cultural and linguistic framework, making rebellion seem futile. Fisher draws attention to how even radical language becomes a form of capitalist branding, devoid of genuine political force.

Chapter 3: Capitalism and the Real

Fisher explores the idea of "capitalist realism" as a form of ideology that controls not just political and economic life, but how we understand reality itself. He references Jacques Lacan's concept of the "Real" and Žižek's interpretation of it, showing how capitalism operates as a background framework that is rarely questioned. Language here is tied to reality-construction, as Fisher emphasizes that the decline of critical language mirrors the inability to imagine non-capitalist realities. The linguistic field, as shaped by capitalism, restricts the terms of discourse and reinforces a worldview in which capitalism seems natural and eternal.

Chapter 4: Reflexive Impotence, Immiseration, and Symbolic Violence

Fisher addresses the phenomenon of "reflexive impotence"—the awareness of capitalist problems without the belief that change is possible. The language of critique becomes hollow when it is widely understood that no viable alternatives exist. Drawing on Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on symbolic violence and power, Fisher examines how language itself is a site of struggle, but has increasingly been subordinated to the logic of neoliberalism. Resistance becomes an ironic gesture, a further sign of helplessness. Earlier theories of linguistic control (such as Noam Chomsky's work on media and political language) resonate here, showing how linguistic manipulation serves as a key tool of capitalist realism.

Chapter 5: October 6, 1979: "Don't Let Yourself Get Attached to Anything"

In this chapter, Fisher examines the disillusionment of postmodernism, particularly after the 1970s. He argues that after the defeat of socialist movements, language shifted from one of collective possibility to individual survival. Fisher connects this to Fredric Jameson's work on the waning of historical consciousness and the rise of a culture of pastiche. The language of individualism replaces the language of solidarity, contributing to the atomization of society and the decline of collective political vocabularies.

Chapter 6: All That Is Solid Melts into PR: Market Stalinism and Bureaucratic Anti-production

Fisher critiques how bureaucracy under neoliberalism has created a language of managerialism that obscures real work and production. Drawing parallels with George Orwell's 1984 and its concept of Newspeak, Fisher shows how neoliberalism has co-opted language to maintain control. This chapter connects with earlier critiques of bureaucracy and language, particularly those from Frankfurt School theorists like Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who examined how administrative language can dehumanize and control. Fisher argues that capitalism's linguistic apparatus now mimics the totalitarian control Orwell described, creating an inescapable web of jargon that replaces genuine meaning.

Chapter 7: "There's No Central Exchange"

Fisher highlights how digital and networked technologies have accelerated the collapse of a linear, historical understanding of time, which has also contributed to the collapse of meaningful language. The chapter reflects earlier critiques by thinkers like Marshall McLuhan, who foresaw the impact of media on communication and thought processes. Fisher shows how the overload of information has led to a fragmentation of discourse, where language becomes flattened and instrumentalized in service of efficiency and productivity.

Chapter 8: Privatization of Stress

Fisher ends by looking at how the privatization of public services and the erosion of welfare states have restructured both labor and language. The language of mental health, once a public issue tied to social and economic conditions, has become privatized. Individuals are now encouraged to “cope” with stress, depression, and anxiety as personal failures rather than symptoms of systemic capitalist exploitation. Fisher draws on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ideas on schizophrenia and capitalism, showing how the fragmentation of subjectivity reflects the fragmentation of language in this hyper-individualized, capitalist society.

Connection to Language Decline and Earlier Texts

Throughout *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher explores how the decline of language is central to the entrenchment of neoliberal capitalism. Earlier theorists like Gramsci, Chomsky, Foucault, and Jameson laid the groundwork for understanding how power operates through the manipulation of language. Fisher extends this, showing how capitalism has not only co-opted political discourse but has also led to the erosion of any linguistic or cultural tools that might offer an alternative vision of the future. The decline of political and cultural language in the face of capitalist realism reflects a broader crisis of imagination, where it becomes impossible to think, speak, or dream outside of the system. The themes Fisher develops in *Capitalist Realism*—the hollowing out of language, the commodification of culture, and the loss of temporal specificity—are expanded upon in *Ghosts of My Life*, where he laments the disappearance of futurity and cultural innovation, linking it directly to the language of stasis and repetition fostered by neoliberalism.

2. Manufacturing Dissent

"Manufacture of Consent"

According to Walter Lippmann, the "manufacture of consent" is a form of democratic propaganda or government public relations. In his view, without such a system of information control and censorship, democracies run the risk of universal disagreement and division, which can eventually cause them to deteriorate into oligarchy or dictatorship. On the other hand, the manufacturing of dissent is the natural state of an unregulated communication system, constantly tending toward chaos and division, much like social entropy. The consent of the governed, Lippmann argues, is always the result of an organized effort; it rarely happens spontaneously. Achieving consensus among the governed is even more challenging. In every known regime, order and understanding are maintained through systematic and intentional regulation of communication, even in systems where censorship is legally prohibited. Thus, the mass media becomes the central stage for political processes, as media content shapes the political discourse of the nation-state. The formation of public opinion is a core task of democratic governance, and this process must be carefully regulated to prevent dysfunction within the communication system. The imposition of a chaotic model of dissent, in which media gain excessive power, is a grave threat to democracy. The goal of many theories of mass communication is to impose order upon this chaos of dissent. Theoretical foundations for this pattern of dissent can be found in the works of many 20th-century mass communication researchers, starting with Walter Lippmann.

In his 1920 book *Liberty and the News*, Lippmann questions whether national unity in a democracy is even possible. How can consensus be reached with freedom of speech and so many differing opinions among individuals? How can there be a single public opinion when every citizen has the right to hold and express their opinions on critical issues? Lippmann concludes that unity and peace are possible only among informed individuals who seek unity of method rather than unity of aim. These individuals, guided by the scientific method and analysis, form educated opinions, and within this informed social environment, contradictions are creative rather than destructive. Dissent, Lippmann believes, arises not from differing opinions but from uneducated individuals. The real problem is the lack of a scientific approach that seeks facts and truth. Lippmann believes in the possibility of creating an educated public opinion but also warns of the dangers that lie along that path. For him, democracy is not a stable or guaranteed system—it is fragile and requires constant effort from an educated citizenry. Democracy can be lost at any time. From his earliest works, Lippmann emphasized the need for regulation and rules in the processes of mass communication and information flow. In his view, the modern understanding of freedom is reserved for the educated and informed individual. Only through scientific analysis and access to information can one form a legitimate opinion. This educated opinion is not for mere self-expression or competition with others—it is meant to influence, to manufacture consent, without which society cannot function. According to Lippmann, the true enemy of democracy is ignorance; democracy is impossible among ignorant individuals. Above all, democracy is a contract between beliefs and realities, and education is the essential bridge between the two. Lippmann feared that too much reliance on competing opinions in the media would only lead to confusion and misery, opening the door to dictatorship. Democracy, he argued, can only survive if it achieves consensus and enables self-governance. The utopia of small-town democracy, where there is a direct connection between beliefs and realities, was a far-off dream that could be easily lost in the complexities of modern governance.

The "Pseudo-Environment" of Democracy

In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann explores the cyclical nature of public opinion, fluctuating between periods of war and peace, consent and dissent. Unlike authoritarian regimes, democracy inherently creates ongoing clashes of opinion and produces systematic dissent. Lippmann contends that because the real world is too complex for direct understanding, democratic governments simplify reality into what he calls a "pseudo-environment"—a constructed framework that helps citizens navigate the world. Public opinion, then, becomes a manufactured representation, much like a simplified map, that the public uses to orient itself in complex environments. Lippmann asserts that people naturally lie and fabricate because storytelling is an essential part of their social function. Proximity to facts and truth holds little social value in this context. In public systems, truth is whatever fiction is deemed functional, no matter the degree of authenticity. Hostile propaganda can, therefore, trigger ideological wars, with each side convinced they are acting in the best interest of all humanity, even to the point of self-destruction.

In Lippmann's view, society achieves unity in this pseudo-environment, where thought, feeling, and action are guided by shared representations of reality—constructed through language, stories, books, newspapers, radio, and television. Public unity, particularly in times of crisis, is most easily manufactured by identifying a common enemy. The "pseudo-environment" is not simply a communication issue but forms the very basis of democratic governance. The flaw of democracy, he argues, is that citizens cannot be informed or competent on all matters. Access

to the real world must often be restricted to maintain this pseudo-environment, for unrestricted access to facts could lead to dissent and division. Even when access to facts is granted, mechanisms are put in place to divert public attention toward sensational, manufactured events. In extreme cases, even military action is used to maintain the pseudo-environment. Lippmann believed that democratic propaganda cannot exist without censorship; before a pseudo-environment can be created, access to the real world must be controlled.

Manufacture of Consent in the Mass Media

The success of wartime propaganda often tempts its use during peacetime, as the existence of external or internal threats allows for authoritarian rule—even in democratic systems. When there is no external enemy to justify aggression, internal conflicts serve as a means of social control. In times of war, dissent is suppressed, and propaganda ensures social cohesion. Lippmann warns that continuing a state of dissent allows public opinion leaders to assert their authority in an unrelenting environment of conflict. For Lippmann, the manufacture of consent is the primary goal of any politician or statesman. If a leader can successfully create consent, they become the natural leader of public opinion and win the trust of the group. Regardless of the actual consequences of their actions, such leaders will be judged primarily by their public image. In the 20th century, the manufacture of consent became an increasingly refined tool for social control. As Lippmann notes, it became more sophisticated with the advent of psychological research and modern communication technologies.

"The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old one that was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has improved enormously in technic because it is now based on analysis rather than the rule of thumb. And so, as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power."

Public Opinion and the Risks to Democracy

The greatest strength of democracy, according to Lippmann, is its ability to find unity within diversity. However, the enmity and disagreement between groups within democratic societies are its greatest challenges. The extreme form of this division manifests as civil conflict or a return to authoritarianism. The power of propaganda in mass society leads to doubts about the future of democracy itself. At the heart of democratic ideology is the ideal of protecting individual freedom and the right to vote, which is mediated through the communication between voters and their elected representatives. Lippmann observed that democracies are always more interested in internal community events, which sustain a pseudo-environment. Within this pseudo-environment, manufacturing consent is essential, while outside the community, conflict and dissent with other groups are actively manufactured to maintain internal unity. Democracies struggle with external diplomacy, as they are naturally inclined to view any non-democratic government as a threat, effectively declaring war against it. Lippmann warned that this internal focus leads to a disinterest in the political system and a lack of oversight, which in turn results in inequality and division. For him, war was the only political act capable of creating a unified public opinion and consolidating society. Democratic wars, according to Lippmann, are unique because they are often waged for pacifist ideals, driven by a belief that they serve the good of

all humanity. These wars, born out of crises of democracy, are fought to preserve democracy itself, and they always begin with propaganda. In a prescient statement from 1922, Lippmann warned of the potential for a second world war and argued that manufacturing dissent between nations was often used to suppress internal dissent. His paradox is clear: the more personal freedom people have, the more conflict and disagreement arise. His hope was that different groups, with their varying opinions and pseudo-environments, would eventually learn to coexist peacefully. Perhaps, Lippmann suggested, the future of democracy lies in a kind of "metaverse" of parallel pseudo-environments, where differing realities can coexist without constant conflict.

"Democratic Propaganda"

Edward Bernays is often regarded as the father of public relations (PR) and the creator of the profession of the Public Relations Council. He was the first to introduce the term PR into the theory of communication and sociology. Bernays expanded on Walter Lippmann's ideas, emphasizing the need for an educated elite to guide the masses and manipulate public opinion to create unity in society. This intelligent minority of specialists must sometimes even create news or direct pseudo-events to manufacture consent. In today's context, where the phenomenon of fake news on the Internet is widely discussed, Bernays' ideas have gained renewed relevance.

Public Opinion and Public Relations

Following the 1920 Peace Conference in Paris, there was a surge of interest in public opinion, and the term "propaganda" began to gain widespread use. The remarkable success of wartime propaganda demonstrated the potential for using similar tactics in peacetime. In 1919, the term "public opinion" was included in Webster's Dictionary. In 1923, Bernays published *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, and that same year, with his help, New York University offered its first university course in public relations. Bernays noted that during the Great Depression, the widespread poverty and social inequality spurred millions of Americans to become more interested in the political and social structure. Every significant decision and action by those in power had to be aligned with public opinion. Bernays outlined the concrete benefits of the new public relations profession, but he was primarily concerned with its relationship to the forces that shape public opinion. He posed critical questions regarding the media's role in society, taking the motto of The New York Times, "All the news that's fit to print," as a starting point. Who decides what news is fit to print? What criteria determine which news should be published? The absence of a common standard for newsworthiness, Bernays suggested, opens the door to manipulation and control over the free exchange of ideas. For Bernays, newsworthy content is determined by what is accepted by enough people to keep the newspaper in business. As a result, editors and media owners often prioritize their own interests over those of society. This raises important questions: Who regulates the process of determining what is essential for the public? Who ensures that the news promotes national unity and the formation of public opinion on key issues? In Bernays' view, society must first agree on the criteria for selecting news. Without this consensus, media outlets will primarily pursue higher circulation and profits rather than the public interest. As a result, the media can end up following public opinion rather than shaping it, leading to a situation in which the institutions are driven by public whims, and chaos ensues as dissent grows.

The Functions of the Mass Media

The distinction between propaganda and education lies at the heart of Bernays' views on media morality. For Bernays, the difference between the two depends on perspective: advocating for what you believe in is education, while advocating for what you do not believe in is propaganda. In nation-states, the role of government is to reconcile the diverse interests and opinions of the people. Bernays argued that society cannot afford to wait for the absolute truth to be discovered; instead, it must construct a working truth that can generate consensus. He refers to this as an abstract or substitute truth that serves as a compromise between the desires and opinions of millions of individuals. For new ideas to gain significance, they must be accepted by the broader group. As a result, society is constantly engaged in a battle of ideas. The future of civilization, according to Bernays, depends on how public opinion is formed and manipulated. Public opinion is both a powerful force for social progress and a potential obstacle if it is not carefully guided by the intellectual and moral elite. Bernays believed that the upper strata of society—the educated, knowledgeable experts, and intellectuals—had a duty to infuse public opinion with moral and spiritual motives. In his view, public opinion should become the nation's public conscience, guiding the selection of news and the creation of events. However, he also warned that if these techniques of persuasion and influence were used for personal or group interests, society would be divided, and trust between people would erode.

The Need for Democratic Propaganda

In 1928, Bernays wrote *Propaganda* to redeem the term from the negative connotations it had gained during World War I. He argued for a new kind of propaganda that underpins democracy and can be applied to all aspects of life. The goal of this propaganda is to bring order out of chaos and create a social structure based on consensus. This is achieved through the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the habits and opinions of the masses in democratic societies. Bernays viewed this process as essential to governance, acknowledging that those who manipulate the invisible mechanisms of society form a kind of secret government that holds the real power. While the masses may be aware of this manipulation, they tacitly accept it in the name of maintaining public order. For Bernays, power in democracy relies on this conscious manipulation of collective habits, which must be subtly concealed to avoid dissent. Without propaganda and manipulation, it would be impossible to manufacture consent among large groups of people. The social nature of humanity, Bernays argued, overrides the individual's pursuit of knowledge and freedom. Public opinion is an illusion in which millions of people are made to believe they share the same thoughts. Without this illusion, the state cannot function. Bernays did not believe in the possibility of raising the literacy and education levels of the entire population to the point where everyone could effectively govern themselves. Despite the spread of education, the democratic doctrine of collective intelligence lacks practical evidence, in his view. He saw education as merely another form of propaganda, arguing that real knowledge and understanding are gained only through interaction with others, not through formal education.

The Engineering of Consent

In 1947, Bernays published an essay that he later expanded into a book in 1955, *The Engineering of Consent*. Unlike Lippmann's "manufacture of consent," Bernays used the term "engineering," though the underlying concept remained the same. He believed that consent could not simply be suggested; it had to be carefully planned and developed through a mass technique of manipulation and public opinion formation. But was such manipulation morally justified? In a liberal society that guarantees freedom of speech and an independent press,

Bernays argued that persuasion, manipulation, and propaganda are also inherent rights. With the advancement of media technology, the public mind becomes more accessible, and everyone has the freedom to try to influence the opinions of others. Bernays recognized the dangerous power of propaganda, which he had helped develop and refine throughout his life. However, he could not foresee the full consequences of this power in the hands of individuals. The revolution in communication technologies created an environment where words became commands, slogans, and tools for mass influence. In this new media landscape, corporate media and social networks have advantages over traditional national media. The educated elite, once tasked with forming public opinion for the common good, has been replaced by anyone who can capture the public's attention and win the battle for popularity. Bernays warned of the dangers inherent in this system, especially as it becomes more intertwined and complex with the rise of the Internet. This network of mixed and overlapping information channels can grant enormous power to those who understand its mechanisms.

Why Should Public Opinion Be Manipulated?

In his 1928 article "Manipulating Public Opinion: The Why and the How," Bernays described public opinion as the collective mind of society at a given moment and on a specific topic. This opinion is not simply the sum of all group opinions but is shaped by traditions and mass habits. Bernays referred to these as the inertia of society, a force that resists change and can impede civilization's progress. According to Bernays, manipulation of public opinion must have a social purpose. It should break through societal inertia when it becomes retrograde or resistant to progress. Manipulating public opinion serves to introduce new ideas and challenge outdated norms. For Bernays, the manipulation of public consciousness is a tool for social progress, allowing society to adapt to new beliefs and habits. Innovators and leaders, equipped with mass persuasion techniques, hold the power to shift public opinion and drive civilization forward.

The Importance of Consent and Trust

For Bernays, engineering consent is not merely a marketing strategy but an essential social tool for creating and maintaining human communities. The absence of a structured system of national propaganda leads to a vacuum, filled by campaigns motivated by personal or group interests. Without national propaganda, foreign propaganda becomes a threat to the unity of the state. Consent, Bernays argued, must be "engineered" through a rational plan devised by trained professionals who believe in the national ideal. Communication, in this context, is not just about the transmission of information but about understanding the audience and creating connections between individuals. This shared knowledge becomes a social bond, fostering trust and unity. Bernays warned that the lack of organized communication systems would lead to dissent, division, and conflict between different groups within society. Whether in a traditional democratic state or on social media, consent does not arise spontaneously. Instead, it must be carefully produced through a deliberate and rational process, ensuring that consent and trust remain the highest ideals of any human community.

The Role of Leadership in Manufacturing Consent

Bernays emphasized that leadership plays a crucial role in manufacturing consent. In his view, leaders must skillfully guide public opinion to maintain social order and unity. The public, according to Bernays, lacks the capacity to govern itself effectively without guidance. He believed that public opinion must be shaped by those with the expertise and the knowledge to influence large groups of people. These leaders, equipped with the techniques of persuasion

and public relations, are responsible for creating a stable environment where the masses can function cohesively. The process of creating consent involves more than just delivering information. It is about crafting narratives that resonate with people's emotions and beliefs, guiding them toward a desired outcome. Leaders must understand the psychological triggers that motivate people and use them to steer public opinion in the right direction. In this sense, the manipulation of public opinion is not inherently malicious; rather, it is necessary for the effective functioning of a democratic society. Without leadership, the chaos of competing opinions could destabilize the social order and lead to division and conflict.

The Dangers of Uncontrolled Dissent

Bernays recognized that uncontrolled dissent within a society could lead to fragmentation and instability. He warned that without a concerted effort to manufacture consent, democracies could be vulnerable to internal strife, where competing interests and ideologies tear apart the fabric of society. Dissent, if left unchecked, could lead to the rise of authoritarian regimes, where the state steps in to impose order through force rather than persuasion. For Bernays, the key to maintaining democracy lies in striking a balance between freedom of speech and the need for unity. While free expression is a fundamental principle of democratic governance, it must be managed to prevent the emergence of destructive forces that could erode the foundations of the state. Public relations, in this context, serves as a tool for managing the natural tensions within a democratic society by fostering dialogue and building consensus.

The Evolution of Public Relations in the Digital Age

While Bernays operated in an era dominated by traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, the principles of public relations he pioneered are even more relevant in the digital age. With the advent of the Internet and social media, the tools for shaping public opinion have multiplied, and the reach of propaganda has expanded globally. In this new digital landscape, the ability to manufacture consent or dissent has become more accessible to a wider range of actors, from governments and corporations to individuals and small interest groups. Social media platforms, in particular, have created an environment where information can be disseminated rapidly and manipulated easily. Algorithms designed to maximize engagement often prioritize sensational or divisive content, amplifying dissent and conflict. In many ways, this reflects Bernays' concerns about the dangers of uncontrolled public opinion. The absence of gatekeepers in digital media has led to the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, all of which have the potential to disrupt social cohesion.

The Future of Public Relations: Engineering Consent in a Fragmented World

In the current era, the challenges to manufacturing consent are greater than ever before. With the fragmentation of the media landscape, public opinion is no longer shaped by a few dominant voices but by a cacophony of competing narratives. As individuals and groups carve out their own spaces online, the task of building consensus becomes increasingly complex. In this context, Bernays' vision of an educated elite guiding public opinion may seem more necessary than ever, though achieving such a vision is increasingly difficult. The role of public relations in this fragmented world must evolve to address these new challenges. While traditional PR techniques focused on creating a unified message that could be disseminated through mass media, the modern public relations professional must navigate a more decentralized and polarized environment. The key to success in this new landscape lies in understanding the

various communities and subgroups that make up the public and crafting tailored messages that resonate with each audience.

The Ethical Implications of Manipulation

Bernays was acutely aware of the ethical implications of manipulating public opinion. He believed that the power to shape public consciousness should be used responsibly, with the ultimate goal of promoting social order and progress. However, he also recognized that these techniques could be abused for personal or political gain, leading to the erosion of trust in democratic institutions. The ethical question of whether it is ever justified to manipulate public opinion remains relevant today. While Bernays argued that such manipulation is necessary for the functioning of society, others might contend that it undermines the very principles of democracy by denying individuals the opportunity to form their own opinions freely. This tension between the need for social cohesion and the preservation of individual autonomy is at the heart of the ongoing debate about the role of public relations and propaganda in a democratic society.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Bernays and Public Relations Today

Edward Bernays' contributions to the field of public relations have had a lasting impact on how governments, businesses, and individuals communicate with the public. His ideas about the engineering of consent and the manipulation of public opinion laid the foundation for modern PR practices, which continue to shape the way we understand communication in a democratic society. In the digital age, the tools for manufacturing consent have evolved, but the underlying principles remain the same. Public relations professionals must navigate an increasingly complex and fragmented media landscape, where the battle for public attention is more intense than ever. As Bernays recognized, the power to influence public opinion carries with it significant ethical responsibilities. The challenge for today's PR professionals is to use this power wisely, promoting social cohesion while respecting the individual's right to form independent opinions. Ultimately, Bernays believed that public relations, when used responsibly, could be a force for good, helping to create a more informed and united society. However, the risk of abuse is always present, and the need for transparency and ethical guidelines in the practice of public relations is as crucial today as it was in Bernays' time. As the digital age continues to transform the way we communicate, the lessons of Bernays' work remain a vital reference point for understanding the power—and the dangers—of public relations in shaping the world we live in.

"The Spiral of Silence"

Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann's book *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion—Our Social Shell*, first published in 1980, introduced a new perspective on public opinion that challenged core assumptions of democratic theory. Noelle-Neumann questioned the validity of the "collective wisdom" of public opinion, viewing it instead as a reflection of individuals' selfish desire to belong to a community. According to her, people seek consensus primarily out of fear of isolation and a need for social recognition. Without this fear, dissent would rise unchecked, leading to societal fragmentation.

In the 2001 foreword to her book, Noelle-Neumann reaffirmed her hypothesis about the spiral of silence, calling for its continued study in the 21st century. She warned of the dangers to

human society posed by leaders who misunderstand the social nature of humanity. The existence of society itself, she argued, is somewhat mysterious, and failure to grasp the behavioral dynamics that hold people together could lead to social disintegration. This disintegration might not necessarily be physical; it could take the form of a loss of shared morality or a commonly accepted public opinion, both of which serve as the glue that binds communities. Without these unifying forces, human society becomes a loose collection of individuals living side by side, not a cohesive social unit. This, Noelle-Neumann feared, is the threat posed by the “manufacture of dissent,” a model that has been increasingly imposed through the rise of the Internet and social networks.

Public Opinion as a Social Bond

At the heart of Noelle-Neumann's theory is the idea that individuals conform to public opinion to demonstrate their belonging to a group. The interests of the group take precedence over personal opinions, and the social nature of humanity prevails over individuality. Even when individuals recognize that a certain path is wrong, they often remain silent to avoid isolation. Social harmony is maintained through a constant compromise between personal and public conscience, a tension individuals must navigate daily. This balance relies on a functional “spiral of silence,” where public morality—based on unwritten laws—puts society above the individual. According to Noelle-Neumann, public morality upholds the notion of consent and unity. For her, public opinion is not meant to highlight every individual's perspective but to create a climate that supports the dominant view, thereby strengthening social cohesion. Public opinion is thus not a tool for solving specific problems but a mechanism for demonstrating collective agreement.

Social Control

The spiral of silence, Noelle-Neumann argued, underpins the social control mechanisms within cohesive groups. Expressing dissent from the group's opinion risks negative attitudes and social isolation. Even more than breaking legal laws, violating social norms can lead to ostracism. A person might evade legal consequences but cannot avoid the public “denial and disapproval” that comes from nonconformity. As she explained, the 20th century saw a shift from the concept of public opinion to the concept of social control. This shift was linked to the rise of mass communication technologies like cinema and radio, which allowed political and social leaders to more effectively guide and manipulate public opinion. By the early 20th century, public opinion polls began to influence elections, with newspapers initiating polls in the pursuit of higher circulation. Over time, public opinion became a powerful and flexible tool, capable of acting as prosecutor, jury, and judge in societal matters. In this way, public opinion became an essential part of social control, manipulated by governments and businesses to maintain power.

The End of Public Opinion

At the start of the 21st century, an increasing number of people began to challenge public morality, leading to a breakdown in moral consensus. The ability to join or leave different communities gave individuals a newfound sense of freedom, unrestrained by traditional societal pressures. Online, individuals could connect with like-minded people with unprecedented speed, without fear of isolation. Virtual communities on the Internet transcended national, cultural, ethnic, and even linguistic boundaries, allowing individuals to shape their identities in a digital social reality. It seemed that in these virtual spaces, the spiral of silence had finally been broken—individuals were no longer constrained by public opinion. However, this

newfound freedom led to the rise of dissent within traditional social structures, particularly within nation-states. Public division could arise from seemingly insignificant cultural elements such as music, fashion, or youth subcultures. In such cases, unwritten norms became just as vital as official laws, and their loss of moral authority could lead to the disintegration of communities. Without public opinion to regulate social relationships, society began to crumble, existing only through historical inertia and without a shared moral consensus. In this environment of moral crisis, political power lost its legitimacy as individuals no longer felt obliged to follow societal norms or state laws.

Unwritten Laws of Consent

For Noelle-Neumann, society's cohesion relies on the personal feelings of each individual, encapsulated in the concept of "consent." The word "consent" derives from the Latin *consentire*, meaning "to feel together." When groups within a nation cannot agree on basic moral principles, the nation's integrity is threatened. The challenge of modern states, then, is to maintain consent despite the coexistence of groups with differing social morals. In this process, education and propaganda serve as two key stages in the creation of social consent. The consent sought is not purely rational but also a shared sense of unity and belonging. The media's role, therefore, is not to search for truth but to impose a unified social morality. Noelle-Neumann raised the paradox of individual independence versus social cohesion, questioning how much a person can resist or isolate from society and what the social consequences might be. The tension between individual independence and social conformity, she argued, lies at the core of human nature.

The Spiral of Silence in the Digital Age

According to Noelle-Neumann, societies have the right to use the threat of isolation as a tool for social control. However, liberal democracies face a crisis when they attempt to censor all anti-democratic views. The Internet and the creation of new online communities challenge the traditional mechanisms of social control, enabling the emergence of new "crowds" where any opinion is permissible. In traditional societies, public morality still has the power to isolate deviant individuals. Public opinion, as Noelle-Neumann described it, acts as a "social shell" that protects society while, at times, suffocating individual freedom. For Noelle-Neumann, public opinion remains a necessary evil, crucial for the stability of society and the foundation of human civilization. She argued that individuals rarely act collectively without some form of coercion or manipulation. The mechanisms of the spiral of silence and the manufacturing of consent are essential for maintaining a unified society without the need for violence. Even in the digital age, it seems these principles of conformity and silence continue to function effectively, albeit in new and complex ways.

"The Propaganda Model"

In 1988, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman exposed the manipulative techniques used to control society through mass media in their influential book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. This book attempts to extend their analysis to the Internet, following similar trends in the digital age. While Chomsky and Herman's ideas oppose those of Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays, both sides focus on how media shapes public opinion. Chomsky and Herman view "manufacturing consent" as a negative force, undermining

democratic ideals. They believe that consent should emerge from open and equal dialogue, not propaganda models designed to manipulate the masses.

Media Under Control

In his 1991 article *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, Chomsky described American democracy as a "spectator democracy." He raised a fundamental question: what role should the media play in a free society? He warned of the dangers of a media system that marginalizes the public, distracts them with patriotic slogans, and leads them into passive submission to the elite. Chomsky questioned whether the public has the strength and capacity to create independent, free public opinion or whether they must accept elite control. According to him, the manufacture of consent in modern democracies has become an open process, but the servitude is self-imposed. Chomsky disagreed with Lippmann and Bernays, who advocated for democratic propaganda led by a specialized, educated class. Instead, Chomsky argued that all citizens must be educated, responsible, and active participants in shaping society. He believed that political ideologies, despite their differences, are united by a desire for power, not a genuine commitment to the people's interests. For Chomsky, true democracy requires mass education and the empowerment of local communities where people can have direct control over their representatives.

Properly Functioning Democracy

Chomsky expressed deep skepticism about Lippmann's vision of a gradual, elite-led democracy. He argued that democracy should be an evolving process, with increasing public participation rather than control by a privileged few. In this view, the propaganda model, which manufactures consent, is a form of permanent social control. A crisis of democracy arises when large segments of the population begin to engage politically, causing dissent and dissatisfaction with the status quo. In Chomsky's analysis, the propaganda model of the 20th century no longer works as it once did. The rise of the Internet and social media has made people more aware of media manipulation, and as a result, the media's ability to manufacture consent has weakened. Today, propaganda primarily consolidates and radicalizes existing opinions rather than changing them. People now consume media with the understanding that it serves some propagandistic purpose, leading to a cycle of dissent and division.

The Propaganda Model 2.0 in the 21st Century

In the 21st century, people in developed democracies are more aware of the propaganda strategies used to manipulate them, yet they continue to accept ideological positions even when they contradict facts. The Internet has created a new form of virtual crowd, where individuals and groups become active propagators of various ideologies. The Internet's multiple-choice propaganda narratives create divisions within society, leading to a constant battle of ideas in the digital public sphere. The lack of centralized censorship in the online environment has resulted in a constant war of ideas. Propaganda is no longer used solely to achieve political unity; it is increasingly used to serve corporate interests. This new model, which Chomsky dubs "Propaganda 2.0," sees dissent as a commodity. Anger, conflict, and division attract large audiences and generate profit, transforming the media into a marketplace for dissent.

The Necessary Illusions

In the 20th-century propaganda model, media served public purposes under the control of an educated elite, who managed public opinion. During the Cold War, external threats were used to unite people against a common enemy, maintaining consent. But in the 21st century, this model is no longer tied to the public interest. Media are now owned by commercial corporations, and audiences themselves have become the product. Emotions like fear, anger, and anxiety guarantee a response from audiences, and as a result, fake news, propaganda, and lies have become more attractive than facts and truth. This mirrors Chomsky's argument in his 1989 book *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, where he stated that illusions are necessary to maintain unity and social order. The manipulation of public opinion is critical to preserving the current system. Chomsky argues that democratizing the media is essential for true democracy. Without such reform, media freedom is often reduced to the freedom of corporate interests to manipulate public opinion. In a media landscape driven by profit, dissent is manufactured to strengthen divisions, diverting attention from the public's role in shaping policy.

Governing With Dissent

The paradox of modern democracy is that it cannot survive without propaganda, yet propaganda now manufactures dissent more than consent. Social media platforms have created a crisis for traditional democracy by enabling individuals to create their ideologies, which often conflict with the needs of a stable society. Instead of a unified public, democracy now faces a fragmented population divided into smaller, hostile groups. The rise of social media has intensified this fragmentation. Without the guiding force of organized propaganda, citizens are left to form their belief systems, which often revolve around emotional and ideological conflict. This "manufacture of dissent" leads to a society that is increasingly difficult to govern. Chomsky advocates for a return to true democratic principles: open dialogue and the constant pursuit of social progress through equality and participation. In his view, democracy should empower individuals to actively shape their societies rather than passively accept manipulation by elites. However, in the current media environment, the ruling elites often use propaganda to create divisions that serve their interests, ensuring the status quo.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, Chomsky's analysis of the propaganda model continues to be relevant, but the Internet and social media have radically altered how propaganda functions. Rather than manufacturing consent, media today manufacture dissent, dividing the public into hostile groups that undermine the unity necessary for democracy to thrive. As long as media remain profit-driven and focused on creating conflict, democracy will remain in crisis, unable to reconcile the need for consent with the reality of growing division. The challenge for the future lies in finding ways to create a media system that fosters genuine dialogue, consent, and participation, rather than one that profits from conflict and dissent. Only then can democracy return to its original principles of open discussion, equality, and true public empowerment.

"The End of History"

The term *The End of History* was first introduced by Hegel and later popularized by Alexandre Kojève, but it gained significant recognition through Francis Fukuyama's 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama argued that history, as a process driven by ideological struggles, reached its endpoint with the global adoption of liberal democracy's principles. The

"end of history" refers primarily to the cessation of ideological battles, suggesting that liberal democracy has no significant ideological competitor. However, this does not mean that liberal democracy will be universally adopted. In fact, history may reverse itself, reviving older models such as non-liberal democracies or banal nationalism, which may, in certain contexts, be more effective at producing social consent. In response, the model of mass communication within liberal democracies has shifted from seeking consent to fostering dissent—a movement away from the democratic ideal.

Fear and Consent

For neoliberalism, particularly in the West, communism was seen as one of the greatest threats to freedom and democracy during the 20th century. Throughout the Cold War, communism played a key role as the antithesis of liberal democracy, providing a negative image that helped Western ideologies solidify their positions. Without this external threat, liberal democracy struggled to maintain a positive self-image. Fukuyama points out that public opinion is often easiest to shape when a common enemy exists. Without such a unifying threat, individual opinions begin to fragment. Henry Kissinger articulated this in 1970 when he stated, "Today for the first time in our history, we face the stark reality that the communist challenge is unending." This maintained a sense of perpetual threat, keeping public opinion mobilized and consent manufactured through fear. The Cold War rhetoric and propaganda techniques persisted into the 21st century, even though many former communist countries had become active participants in the global economy. Fukuyama also observes that totalitarian regimes, like democracies, relied on the "consent of the governed." Consent cannot be sustained purely through violence and coercion; it must be manufactured using soft power and propaganda. The difference between democracy and dictatorship lies in how consent is produced. In democracies, consent is manipulated through democratic propaganda and the shaping of public opinion, while in dictatorships, coercion and censorship are more overt. However, both systems require some level of public trust in the media. Even in totalitarian states, consent is part of the social contract between elites and the governed. Fukuyama notes that the similarities in propaganda techniques on both sides of the Iron Curtain are striking. Propaganda requires an enemy or a counter-propaganda force to function effectively. The Cold War demonstrated that, as the conflict waned, the power of ideological manipulation diminished as well. As the Internet emerged, access to information became easier, making propaganda more difficult to maintain. This contributed to the erosion of the old models of consent, leading to an era of dissent on both sides of the former Cold War divide.

Conflicts in Democracy

Liberal democracies, which triumphed in the Cold War, relied on manufacturing consent through the ideals of freedom and material prosperity. The mass media played a central role in forming a unified public opinion on crucial issues. However, the ability of liberal democracies to resolve conflicts is limited to contexts where there is already a broad social consensus on core values. According to Fukuyama, certain non-economic issues, such as ethnic identity and social status, pose significant challenges for democracy. Traditional communities with strong internal cohesion are often resistant to the methods of propaganda and manipulation that work within more individualistic liberal societies. In liberal democracies, people tend to act based on personal interests rather than collective national goals. This individualism often puts liberal democracy at odds with the cohesion required by nation-states. In many cases, democratic governments must revert to illiberal strategies to maintain national unity. Fukuyama also argues

that democracy is inherently unable to resolve disputes between different ethnic or national groups, particularly when issues like national sovereignty are at stake. Furthermore, while liberal democracies promote human rights as universal, these rights cannot be upheld without a universal power structure. Human rights imply reciprocal obligations, and the social contract requires commitments alongside these rights. However, when the state becomes merely a protector of rights without offering higher ideals, it risks losing its legitimacy. A state without guiding principles is replaced by international alliances or economic groups driven by market interests, where material wealth becomes the highest value.

The Power of the Powerless

Fukuyama's fifteenth chapter in *The End of History* titled "Vacation in Bulgaria," quotes Vaclav Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* (1980), offering a vivid illustration of how ideology and consent functioned in communist Czechoslovakia. Havel uses the example of a greengrocer who, out of fear of the regime, places a slogan in his shop window that reads, "Workers of the world, unite!" This simple act of obedience conceals the deeper truth: the grocer is afraid of power and therefore submits. By publicly conforming to an ideology, even if it is a lie, he preserves his dignity and social standing. Ideology becomes the facade behind which fear and obedience hide. Havel argues that this type of ideology is a common tool of political systems, not just in totalitarian regimes. People often publicly support ideals they do not believe in because it provides them with social status. In late socialism, for example, the state sought to maintain consent through material promises, such as consumer goods, rather than through genuine ideological conviction. This shift represents the beginning of a model in which consent is bought rather than earned. In this way, late socialism mirrored the capitalist methods of consumerism by trading material goods for public consent. The state was no longer a symbol of national unity but a mere supplier of commodities. As a result, private corporations began to surpass states in power and efficiency, contributing to the victory of liberal democracy in the Cold War.

The End of Ideology

Fukuyama suggests that the fall of communism and the victory of liberal democracy were driven not by ideological conviction but by material prosperity. For many Eastern Europeans, the end of communism was less about political freedom and more about the promise of a higher standard of living in the West. This materialism has led to a shift where people now choose where to live and what to believe based on economic interests rather than ideological or cultural ties. Ideology has become a commodity, and the public no longer feels solidarity with national ideals. The end of history, according to Fukuyama, can also be seen as the end of ideology. The triumph of liberal democracy is a Pyrrhic victory. The rational individual in a liberal society, as Fukuyama describes, is *The Last Man* of history, a figure who no longer needs to be public-spirited or concerned with the welfare of others. Instead, as Kant suggested, a liberal society could be made up of "rational devils," provided they are governed by laws of rational self-interest. In the end, Fukuyama's *The End of History* presents a sobering view of the future. While liberal democracy has triumphed over its ideological rivals, it now faces the challenge of sustaining itself in an era where material interests and individualism dominate, and where the traditional mechanisms of manufacturing consent have given way to the manufacture of dissent.

"Agenda Setting"

Agenda-setting theory examines the media's ability to shape public priorities by determining which topics and events receive attention. By controlling what issues are highlighted in their programming, the media effectively create news that influences public perception. For audiences that rely on media to understand the world, the media's agenda becomes their personal guide for assessing the significance of events. The theory suggests that the systematic repetition of specific language, images, and themes by the media can both generate consent and incite dissent.

According to agenda-setting theory, the mass media do not simply reflect political reality; they actively construct it. Public consent and unity depend heavily on the media's messaging. This approach was formally proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their 1968 Chapel Hill study, which explored the media's influence on public attitudes during the U.S. presidential election. They found a strong correlation between the issues that media emphasized and what the public in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, viewed as the most important election topics. This research demonstrated how the media plays a key role in shaping public opinion by selecting and framing the news. McCombs and Shaw's study, titled *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*, was published in 1972 and remains relevant today. Their research showed that the media not only informs the public but also shapes the perceived importance of issues by giving some stories more prominence than others. Walter Lippmann, in his 1922 book *Public Opinion*, had already noted that media could distort the images in people's minds, making them disconnected from reality. McCombs and Shaw expanded on Lippmann's idea, observing that most political activity happens within the media's framework, leaving people with little knowledge of the actual political process outside what is reported. This makes the media the primary space for citizens to engage with politics and form their understanding of political issues. McCombs and Shaw also referenced Bernard Cohen, who argued in his 1963 book *The Press and Foreign Policy* that the media "may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." This reflects the power of the media to set the public agenda through selective reporting. The importance of news, or its "salience," is determined by how frequently and prominently an issue is presented. The media acts as a guide, signaling to the public which issues are most important and framing the boundaries of public discourse.

The Chapel Hill study compared the issues reported in newspapers, on the radio, and on television with what undecided voters thought was important during the 1968 U.S. presidential election. The results showed that voters tended to align their views with the media's portrayal of what was most significant. This supported the hypothesis that mass media have a powerful agenda-setting role, shaping public opinion by influencing what issues are perceived as critical. One of the significant implications of agenda-setting theory is its ability to not only highlight specific issues but also to suppress others. This creates a form of "framing," where certain topics are prioritized while others are marginalized or ignored, limiting public access to diverse viewpoints. This can lead to a phenomenon McCombs describes as "planned obsolescence of communication," where media consumption prevents individuals from seeking additional information and leaves them poorly informed. In 1977, McCombs published a solo article, *Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*, where he emphasized that the salience of news is conveyed through factors like headline size and frequent repetition. He argued that the media agenda becomes a lens through which we perceive the world. Similar to advertising, media messages attract attention and suggest which issues should be viewed as important. Agenda-

setting, therefore, becomes closely linked with the concept of manufacturing consent. McCombs pointed out that public opinion surveys often reflect pre-determined media priorities, reinforcing the media's control over public discourse. In a 1993 article, *The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas*, McCombs and Shaw reflected on the growing power of the media and how its interests often overshadow the public agenda. They noted that today's media functions less as a public forum and more as a representation of society, raising the question: Who controls the media's agenda? This question ties directly into the debate over "newsworthiness," a concept central to both journalism and public relations. The New York Times famously uses the motto "All the News That's Fit to Print," but what constitutes "fit" news remains a mystery. The criteria for determining newsworthiness may, in reality, be driven by the interests of media owners, whose priorities often conflict with those of society and the state. Today, the economic model of online media prioritizes keeping audiences engaged, often through sensationalism and conflict. This trend has led to the manufacture of dissent, where polarizing topics and disagreements are highlighted to maintain audience attention. Rather than fostering informed public discourse, the agenda-setting function of modern media can fuel division, shaping public opinion in ways that serve commercial or ideological interests rather than the common good.

"Pseudo News"

In *The Spiral of Silence*, Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann references German sociologist Niklas Luhmann's 1971 book *Politische Planung* (Political Planning), noting the similarities between Luhmann's ideas and Walter Lippmann's studies on the manufacture of consent. Both Luhmann and Lippmann focus on how simplifying the world's complexities and unifying opinions help shape public opinion. Luhmann's concept of "public opinion" (*öffentlichen Meinung*) suggests that society achieves consensus by reducing complexity, thus facilitating communication and action. For both thinkers, public opinion is a tool for social control, manufactured by media systems to manage the complexity of modern society. Niklas Luhmann, a leading figure in systems theory, views social systems as primarily systems of communication, with interactions occurring both between the system and its environment, and within the subsystems and groups that compose it. He introduces the term "differentiation," which refers to dividing a complex system into subsystems, such as separating politics from religion, religion from science, and science from education. These subsystems, once independent, produce their own realities, risking the disintegration of the overarching system—such as the state—unless they maintain active interconnections. The health of the overall social system depends on the constant, dynamic relationships between these subsystems, enabling social evolution and progress.

Self-Monitoring Management

In his 1996 book *The Reality of the Mass Media* (*Die Realität der Massenmedien*), Luhmann explores the role of mass media in self-regulating the public system. He argues that mass media create a reality that individuals accept, even though they are aware of the mechanisms of its production. The accuracy of news, according to Luhmann, is secondary to its narrative function, which is to create a meaningful story that fits within a broader value system. Media messages must fit into an existing narrative framework to be deemed suitable for public discussion. The larger the audience, the more superficial the treatment of topics becomes, as the system cannot handle an indefinite number of complex issues at once. For Luhmann, the primary function of public opinion is not to solve problems but to bring attention to specific topics for discussion.

Attention is the driving force of public opinion, and media thematization becomes an automatic process where the goal is simply to attract more attention and viewers. This process becomes even more pronounced with the rise of the Internet, where the search for larger audiences leads to the creation of virtual forms of publicity, which often lack the depth of real public discourse.

The Ideal Complex Social System

Luhmann's vision of a complex social system is one in which subsystems and individuals coexist freely, each constructing their own reality while maintaining communication with others. This system fosters social creativity through the coexistence of multiple realities. The ideal system allows for both differentiation and integration, and mass media serve as tools for managing complexity by providing simplified "maps" and "signposts" that guide individuals through the overwhelming array of information. The media's agenda-setting function is part of this process, framing topics and presenting issues in ways that shape public opinion. Luhmann emphasizes that the mass media's role is to manage society's self-observation. Media act as a mirror in which society can see itself and reflect on its state. While media connect past and present, stimulate communication, and generate meanings, they also play a destabilizing role by challenging long-standing assumptions of social stability. The belief that social stability depends solely on consensus or shared faith is, according to Luhmann, a misconception. Paradoxically, dissent is the true driver of social change, and systems must channel dissent productively to maintain progress. For Luhmann, public consensus often hinders social creativity because it is based on outdated agreements that no longer address the current complexities of society. In a complex, non-transparent system, meaningful communication can only occur in the presence of dissent. The mass media, with their ability to construct new realities, play a crucial role in fostering this dissent. However, their function is not to produce genuine transparency but to create an illusion of transparency, making clear facts appear obscure and constructing public opinion from selective information.

Second-Order Cybernetics

Luhmann introduces the concept of "second-order cybernetics" to address the paradox of media-created realities. The term, coined by Heinz von Foerster in 1974, distinguishes between "first-order cybernetics," which deals with observing systems, and "second-order cybernetics," which involves the observation of observers. Luhmann applies this to media, arguing that media, sociology, and communication sciences often analyze the very systems they themselves have constructed. People accept the media's version of reality even when they are aware of the underlying manipulation, creating a paradox of belief in fabricated realities. This paradox is similar to the concept of "kayfabe" in professional wrestling, where audiences accept a fictional reality despite knowing it is staged. Luhmann also draws on the example of the Gulf War, arguing that the media's portrayal of the conflict was shaped by their expectations of what war should look like. The media's staging of events—turning the war into a spectacle—demonstrates their ability to reshape reality according to their narrative needs. Jean Baudrillard's famous essay *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* echoes Luhmann's views, arguing that the war was more a media simulation than a real conflict. The media's portrayal of war, Baudrillard suggests, was a radical form of manufacturing consent, aligning reality with their constructed image. For Luhmann, this process shows how the mass media can not only manipulate reality but also redefine the truth itself in line with their narratives. In conclusion, Niklas Luhmann's exploration of the media's role in society reveals a complex interplay between communication, reality construction, and public opinion. Mass media do not simply

reflect society; they actively shape it by manufacturing consent and, increasingly, dissent. The media create a shared vision of the future, maintaining the appearance of public consensus while obscuring the mechanisms of manipulation that underpin it. Through second-order cybernetics, Luhmann shows how media systems perpetuate their own influence, even as individuals remain aware of the constructed nature of the realities they consume.

“Distorted Communication”

In his 1991 book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Jürgen Habermas presents the Enlightenment as a time for change—a pivotal moment when humanity began transitioning from self-imposed immaturity to a state of maturity. In this mature state, individuals must use their reason in public discourse. Habermas envisioned a society where every person becomes a public intellectual, communicating ideas openly to the world. Today, this vision is partially realized through online media, where anyone can publish their thoughts globally. However, the rise of this communication medium has also fostered a climate of dissent, with the collision of countless perspectives creating tension rather than unity. The transformation of global communication into an international open-access platform is a defining event of the 21st century, symbolizing humanity's step toward intellectual maturity. Yet, this journey is hindered by the planned obsolescence of communication, a kind of intellectual adolescence that prevents full independence and fosters the "manufacture of dissent."

Staging Public Opinion

The Enlightenment, as Habermas describes, is about freeing oneself from external control over one's thinking. Self-imposed immaturity is not a lack of reason, but rather a lack of courage to use it independently. However, in modern democratic theory, propaganda and the "manufacture of consent" are seen as essential to the functioning of democracy, though Habermas criticizes the outcome of this manipulation, calling it "staged public opinion." Staged opinion is created artificially, often with specific interests in mind, simulating concern over a topic to manipulate the masses. This kind of opinion undermines spontaneous, organic communication, which is essential for social creativity and progress. Habermas warns that society is regressing into a form of "communication feudalism," where charismatic leaders and opinion-makers control small, fragmented groups within a larger fractured society. In this environment, consensus is built around narrow, shared interests rather than broad societal values. Habermas argues that strategic communication and public relations have gained a political role, influencing even the state, which now operates more like a business, treating individuals as consumers rather than citizens. To regain legitimacy and reclaim public discourse, the state must redefine its role in a digital age where public opinion is shaped more by private interests than by democratic processes.

The Power and Role of Public Opinion

Habermas critiques the manipulation of public opinion as an instrument of domination. Public opinion, in his view, correlates directly with power, existing as a tool in the relationship between authority and the people. He metaphorically describes public opinion as a friction that the government can control by applying the "necessary lubricant" of propaganda, ensuring public support and legitimacy. Consent, he argues, is always manufactured from a position of strength, whether in political campaigns or advertising. Once the social fabric frays and individual

relationships weaken, people become more susceptible to having opinions imposed on them. In such a scenario, public opinion becomes less a reflection of free thought and more an artificial construct. The public is replaced by an audience of isolated individuals, more influenced by broadcasted opinions than engaged in true public discourse. This transformation signals a shift toward a society of atomized individuals, devoid of genuine interpersonal communication and collective purpose.

Pseudo-Communication and the Virtual Masses

The fundamental difference between "public" and "mass" lies in how consensus and conflict are produced. Public opinion, in theory, reflects a moral consensus born of direct, free exchanges of views, whereas in mass society, elites and opinion leaders manufacture consent and impose it on the majority. This "manufacture of consent" brings about social peace and order but at the cost of genuine community bonds. The dominant paradigm of power and control that Habermas critiques creates what he calls "systematically distorted communication," where the true purpose of language—mutual understanding—is undermined by its use as a tool of control. In interpersonal communication, each word is directed at a specific listener, seeking understanding. In mass communication, however, words function more like commands issued to a passive audience. The lack of genuine interaction creates a false sense of understanding, which Habermas refers to as "pseudo-communication." Participants believe they are engaging in dialogue, but in reality, they are merely exchanging predetermined responses. This illusion of communication fosters a "pseudo-normality," a collective delusion where social systems appear healthy on the surface, but are fundamentally dysfunctional.

The Language of Power

Habermas' concept of systematically distorted communication is expanded by Alan Gross in his 2010 article *Systematically Distorted Communication: An Impediment to Social and Political Change*. Gross highlights how one side of the communication process often operates in a state of self-deception, unaware of the manipulation at play. He gives examples such as the rise of Nazi propaganda in Europe and the influence of pharmaceutical companies on doctors, illustrating how manipulation can deceive individuals into believing they are making independent decisions. The ideal form of manipulation, Gross argues, is when people act like machines, following instructions as though they were their own ideas. In democratic societies, self-deception is at the heart of power's legitimacy. Unlike dictatorships, where force is overt, democratic manipulation relies on convincing the masses that they are in control. This self-delusion is what makes distorted communication so dangerous, as it allows for a veneer of freedom and autonomy while systematically undermining true agency.

Pseudo-Normality and Systemic Pathology

In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas delves deeper into the pathologies of institutions, likening their rigidity to neuroses. Just as individuals with neuroses compulsively repeat actions, institutions—particularly in media and business—produce content based on outdated models, even when it no longer serves the needs or desires of the public. This rigid adherence to established patterns mirrors the same neurotic tendencies seen in individuals and leads to distorted communication on a systemic level. These shared networks of belief serve to justify inequalities in power, limiting critical debate and excluding dissenting voices. The language of domination and power, constructed through careful manipulation of words and ideas, creates a closed system where alternative viewpoints are marginalized. This language,

designed to perpetuate self-delusion, becomes ingrained in public discourse, making it difficult for individuals to break free from its grip.

The Digital Age and the Manufacture of Dissent

In the digital age, the dynamics of communication have shifted, but the fundamental problems Habermas identified remain. The mass media and online platforms still serve as tools for manufacturing consent—or increasingly, dissent—through distorted communication. The Internet allows for the rapid spread of ideas, but it also fosters fragmentation, with individuals retreating into echo chambers that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs. The rise of digital corporations and their control over online spaces has led to a new form of neo-feudalism, where dissent and conflict are commodified. These companies profit from the "traffic" generated by anger, disagreement, and division, exploiting emotional engagement for commercial gain. As a result, public discourse has become more polarized, with manipulation and propaganda thriving in this new media landscape.

Conclusion: A New Language for a New Era

Habermas' critique of systematically distorted communication is more relevant than ever in an age of digital media and virtual communities. The language of power continues to dominate, shaping public discourse and creating a pseudo-reality that benefits those in control. However, the Internet also offers the potential for change. Virtual communities, free from the constraints of traditional power structures, have the ability to create new forms of communication based on equality and shared understanding. For this change to occur, the language of domination and power must be replaced with a new language—one that fosters true dialogue and mutual respect. Only then can the democratic achievements of mass communication be preserved, and the dangers of digital neo-feudalism be avoided. As we navigate this new landscape, the challenge will be to resist the lure of manipulation and embrace a more inclusive and authentic form of public discourse.

Digital Capitalism and Decorative Democracy

In his 2016 study, *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda*, Oliver Boyd-Barrett makes a compelling observation about the role of media in shaping conflict and the emergence of a new kind of capitalism—"digital capitalism." He argues that mass media thrives on conflict and dissent, which are essential to creating unique, engaging content. This principle transcends ideology and national interests, as the primary goal of media under digital capitalism is to control the continuous flow of information, not to resolve conflicts or clarify facts. In this system, media content becomes just another part of the broader economic machinery, serving the demands of a market driven by constant information flow. This insight echoes the notion of "digital capitalism" coined by Dan Schiller in his 1999 book *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System*. Schiller argued that instead of balancing or regulating the market, digital capitalism exacerbates inequality and concentrates power in the hands of elites. As the digital economy expands, it infiltrates all sectors, including education, science, and media, and imposes market-driven logic on them. The development of the internet has exemplified the neoliberal ideal of unrestricted growth, creating a network that thrives on an endless supply of information. Corporations, driven by the imperatives of this networked

society, have made the internet the central platform for business communication, marking the true beginning of digital capitalism.

The Nature of Digital Capitalism

Digital capitalism functions as a supranational entity, its primary goal being the unceasing expansion of information within a controlled communication network. It is the ideal market utopia, offering endless growth in cyberspace. Internet traffic is quantified not by the value or accuracy of information but by the sheer volume of data exchanged between users. In this system, information becomes a commodity traded by corporations, who buy and sell traffic, maximizing their exposure through advertisements and public relations campaigns. The market principle of internet media is self-sustaining: truth, balance, and consensus only matter if they generate traffic. Conflict, sensationalism, and false news become powerful tools for capturing attention, driving up profits for media companies. In his 2015 article *Digital Capitalism: Stagnation and Contention*, Schiller warns that digital capitalism undermines democratic structures. The easiest way to capture audience attention is by polarizing public opinion and promoting radical viewpoints, a strategy that results in greater media loyalty. This not only fuels open conflict between different media outlets but also leads to a war of opinions among audiences, a model of identification through dissent rather than consensus.

The Manufacture of Dissent

The media's new business model, centered around manufacturing dissent, weakens social cohesion and trust in nation-states while advancing individual and corporate interests. People increasingly distrust official information, and the internet's open access to digital archives allows for the proliferation of conspiracy theories and challenges to the status quo. In this culture of transparency, where it seems like all facts are available, centralized governments struggle to maintain control over public morality, unity, and consent. The age of revelation, facilitated by the internet, exposes the mechanisms of state power and undermines political ideologies, leading to a crisis in democratic legitimacy. This crisis paves the way for the rise of "formal democracies," which disguise authoritarian regimes and oligarchies under the guise of democratic structures. The unregulated market model of online media plays a significant role in promoting anti-democratic trends, posing a serious risk to the survival of democracy itself.

Decorative Democracy

The recognition of this crisis within liberal democracy leads to a need for a new paradigm of communication. On one hand, the internet enables authoritarian regimes to impose a "pseudo-communication" model, producing the illusion of consent through manipulation. On the other hand, it fosters the liberalization of communication systems in traditionally authoritarian states, where democratic developments are slowly emerging. This dual dynamic is part of what is now called "surveillance capitalism"—the extensive monitoring of personal data and censorship of politically sensitive information. The internet's privatization of information control, where digital corporations manage citizens' data, further complicates the relationship between democracy and freedom of speech. Evgeni Morozov, in his 2017 article *Moral Panic Over Fake News Eats the Real Enemy—the Digital Giants*, highlights the risk posed by the unchecked power of these digital corporations. He argues that the problem of fake news is not just about disinformation but about the market-driven logic that prioritizes clicks and profits over truth. Morozov warns that the real danger to democracy lies not in foreign propaganda but in the

consolidation of immature democracies at home, where elites prioritize profit over the public good. The 2016 U.S. presidential election, marked by the conflict between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, exemplifies the model of manufacturing dissent. The election not only intensified divisions within the American populace but also served as a prime example of how digital corporations profit from this discord. A study by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) titled *The Divide Over America's Future: 1950 or 2050?* shows that the country is deeply divided along ideological lines, with digital media platforms like Facebook exacerbating these rifts for financial gain. Platforms are forced to regulate content and impose censorship, all while continuing to profit from sensationalist, often misleading information.

The Paradox of Information Control

The problem of unregulated information is particularly dangerous in a system where both media and state power are subject to market forces. Information becomes a tradeable commodity, with access to verified facts being restricted to maintain profit margins. This dynamic, in turn, challenges the very foundations of national history and democratic ideals, as the media's role shifts from promoting public accountability to fueling division. In liberal democracies, where free speech and a free press are foundational, the challenge becomes how to maintain the consent of the governed without resorting to censorship or propaganda. As digital capitalism continues to dominate, traditional political models are forced to adapt. While some authoritarian states, such as China and Russia, have embraced forms of managed democracy that resemble the ideas of Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays, other countries struggle to balance free speech with the need for a more regulated information environment.

Conclusion: The Threat to Democratic Society

The unchecked growth of digital capitalism, with its emphasis on traffic, sensationalism, and conflict, poses a significant risk to democracy. Economic interests, driven by the need for profit, exploit dissent and division, inciting hatred, violence, and even war. The problem of manufacturing dissent is not just a media issue but a fundamental challenge to the development of democracy itself. Free media is essential to a healthy civil society, where individuals can form and express their opinions without interference. However, the more independent the media becomes from state control, the more it chases profits at any cost, creating an arena where opinions are shaped by conflict rather than consensus. This leaves governments vulnerable to shifting public opinion, making long-term policymaking difficult and threatening the legitimacy of the state. True democratic change would require information equality and a decentralized global communication system. However, as of now, there is little evidence that such trends are emerging. Instead, the future of democracy remains uncertain in the face of growing digital capitalism and its pervasive influence over public discourse.

Trust and Dissent in Democracy

In his 2013 book *Power Systems: Conversations on Global Democratic Uprisings and the New Challenges to US Empire*, Noam Chomsky highlights a fundamental problem of democracy that dates back to Aristotle, who is often called the "father of logic," and James Madison, the "father of the American Constitution." Both thinkers wrestled with the issue of inequality but proposed different solutions. In *Politics*, Aristotle argued that democracy was preferable to oligarchy but noted a significant challenge: economic inequality. He feared that if non-property-owning citizens voted solely in their own interest, they might seize the property of the wealthy.

Aristotle's solution was to reduce inequality in society. James Madison faced a similar challenge in the context of the United States but took a different approach. He proposed the so-called "Madisonian model," which limited democracy rather than inequality. Madison believed power should remain in the hands of the Senate, a body dominated by wealthy landowners who would protect their own interests. Today, this dilemma resurfaces in the digital age, as new technologies related to intellectual property and media ownership mirror the Madisonian model, with wealthy media owners acting to protect their own interests.

Digital Capitalism and Social Inequality

Digital capitalism, a term popularized by Dan Schiller, exacerbates existing inequalities by concentrating wealth and power among those who control the flow of information. In the internet era, inequality—both social and informational—cannot be hidden, as anyone can access data revealing these disparities. This transparency forces elites to rely on propaganda, public relations, and advertising strategies to justify their positions. However, this only serves to erode trust, which is essential for maintaining social cohesion and capital. Trust, in this context, arises from natural, spontaneous communication, untainted by manipulation or "manufacturing" strategies. True trust between individuals stems from their ability to coexist peacefully, even when they disagree. The rise of digital capitalism has led to a decline in social capital. As inequality becomes more visible, elites shift from "manufacturing consent" to manufacturing dissent, using division as a strategy to maintain control. This tactic fosters ideological battles in the media, creating a civil war of opinions rather than genuine dialogue. While this may have short-term effects, it ultimately leads to greater tension and mistrust.

The Manufacture of Consent and Dissent

The term "manufacture of consent," coined by Walter Lippmann, originally referred to the creation of public opinion through deliberate manipulation. Edward Bernays expanded on this idea in *Engineering Consent*, suggesting that media and elites could "manage" and "arrange" public sentiment. However, both concepts imply a level of deceit and manipulation that undermines genuine societal trust. In both models, the pseudo-connection created by the media eventually leads to a breakdown of social cohesion. Francis Fukuyama, in his 1995 book *Trust: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*, discusses the importance of trust in fostering a functioning civil society. He argues that trust is a social capital, a product of spontaneous communication and the foundation of a stable democratic system. Trust, in this sense, goes beyond political ideology or economic interests—it is about the ability of people to live together, communicate freely, and form relationships based on mutual respect. However, as society becomes more complex, and the media landscape more fragmented, trust becomes harder to establish. The internet has amplified this fragmentation, making it difficult to maintain the trust necessary for social cohesion. Virtual spaces, while enabling the formation of new communities, often lack the spontaneous and genuine interactions required to build strong social bonds. Instead, they often replicate the conflicts and divisions found in real-world political and social life.

Social Capital and Virtual Communities

Fukuyama's concept of "social capital" is closely tied to the idea of trust. Social capital is the invisible glue that binds communities together, and it is built over time through shared values and experiences. It cannot be manufactured or imposed from above—it must emerge naturally from interpersonal relationships. The internet has the potential to create new communities and

foster social capital, but only if these relationships are built on trust and spontaneity rather than manipulation. Virtual communities, when created organically, can mirror the spontaneous relationships found in real-world communities. These groups can serve as a foundation for broader social networks, fostering trust and cooperation. However, the internet also allows for the creation of pseudo-communities—groups formed without genuine connections or shared values. These communities are often driven by political or economic interests and lack the trust necessary for long-term stability. The danger of digital capitalism lies in its ability to exploit these divisions for profit. The internet can easily become a tool for manufacturing dissent, dividing societies along ideological lines and undermining the trust that holds them together. This process is already evident in many virtual communities, where individuals rally around specific ideologies or leaders, creating echo chambers that deepen divisions.

The Crisis of Trust

The erosion of trust in society, driven by manipulation and propaganda, leads to a broader crisis of confidence in democratic institutions. In 1979, U.S. President Jimmy Carter delivered a speech addressing this very issue, warning of a "crisis of confidence" that threatened the fabric of American democracy. Carter recognized that the detachment of political and economic elites from the public was at the heart of this crisis, and he emphasized the need to restore trust in the government, media, and other institutions. Carter's speech remains relevant today, as digital capitalism exacerbates this crisis of trust. The internet allows for greater transparency but also fuels division and conflict. The manipulation of information for political or economic gain undermines the foundations of democracy, making it difficult for citizens to trust the institutions that govern them. The media, once seen as a pillar of democracy, has become a battleground for competing ideologies, further eroding public confidence.

The Threat to Democracy

In the 21st century, the challenge for democracies is to restore trust in institutions and rebuild social capital in an increasingly digital world. The internet has the potential to democratize information and foster greater participation, but it can also be a tool for division and manipulation. The rise of digital capitalism has led to a shift from the "manufacture of consent" to the "manufacture of dissent," where conflict and division are used to maintain the status quo. This shift threatens the very foundations of democracy. As social capital erodes, and trust in institutions declines, the risk of authoritarianism grows. The ability of citizens to form genuine communities and engage in meaningful dialogue is essential to the survival of democracy. Without trust, societies become fragmented, and the legitimacy of democratic institutions is called into question. To counter these trends, democratic societies must find ways to foster genuine communication and rebuild trust. This may involve regulating digital media, promoting transparency, and encouraging the formation of communities based on shared values rather than manufactured dissent. The future of democracy depends on the ability to restore social capital and create a system of communication that is free from manipulation and deceit.

Dissidents' Dissent and Cognitive Infiltration

Cass Sunstein, an influential American author and legal scholar, has argued that both consent and dissent are crucial for maintaining high levels of social capital in democracies. He advocates for the state's right to regulate the balance between the two, even if this means manipulating public opinion, provided it is done in the public interest. This view presents a

controversial stance on state control, where propaganda and censorship are framed as tools that can be used to protect democratic principles. Sunstein's work is one of the few theoretical approaches that explicitly addresses the "manufacture of dissent" in the modern era of mass communication and the Internet. From 2009 to 2012, Sunstein served as the chief administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs under President Barack Obama, a position that earned him the informal title of "Information Czar." In this role, he proposed the creation of a "Department of State Bureau of Internet and Cyberspace Affairs" to monitor and regulate dangerous information that could threaten the status quo. In his 2009 book, *Republic.com 2.0*, Sunstein warns about the risks of "information cocoons" and "echo chambers," where people only interact with like-minded individuals online, narrowing their perspectives. He argues that the Internet's vast choice of information could actually harm democracy by reinforcing biased viewpoints.

Libertarian Paternalism and Choice Architecture

Sunstein introduced the concept of "libertarian paternalism," which supports the right of governments and private organizations to subtly manipulate public opinion while still respecting individuals' freedom of choice. This concept was elaborated in his 2008 book *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. In it, Sunstein argues that while people often make irrational choices, a gentle "nudge" from the state or private entities can guide them toward better decisions without removing their autonomy. This form of "soft paternalism" is designed to limit harmful actions resulting from "bounded rationality"—the idea that people's decision-making is often flawed due to limited information or cognitive biases. Sunstein's approach continues the tradition of figures like Harold Lasswell, Walter Lippmann, and Edward Bernays, who advocated for democratic propaganda. However, Sunstein's "soft paternalism" takes into account the digital age, where dissent is seen as both a necessary and valuable element of a healthy democracy. Unlike hard methods of censorship and control, soft power allows for dissent, but only as a speech act, without real political action that might challenge the status quo.

The Necessity of Dissent

In his 2003 book *Why Societies Need Dissent*, Sunstein defends the right to disagree and argues that expressing dissent is a moral obligation, particularly for intellectuals. He posits that dissent is vital to democracy, as it serves as a corrective to majority opinion and prevents groupthink. In his view, the ability to freely express differing opinions, especially in tightly-knit or isolated groups, is essential for intellectual and social progress. Sunstein compares modern social movements, such as the Arab Spring of 2011, to historical revolutionary moments like the 1848 European revolutions, emphasizing how advances in communication technologies—from cheap newspapers in the 19th century to social media today—have fueled these uprisings. In both eras, free communication and mass dissemination of information increased dissent and created revolutionary conditions. For Sunstein, dissent enriches society by offering alternative perspectives, which are crucial for decision-making and maintaining a healthy democracy.

Cognitive Infiltration and the Manufacture of Dissent

Sunstein's views on dissent take a more complex turn in his 2008 article *Conspiracy Theories*, co-authored with Adrian Vermeule. Here, Sunstein proposes a controversial method called "cognitive infiltration," where government agents infiltrate conspiracy theory groups to challenge their beliefs from within. This tactic is designed to counter the spread of harmful

conspiracy theories that undermine trust in government institutions. Sunstein specifically targets conspiracy theories such as the false claim that the U.S. government was behind the 9/11 attacks. He argues that these theories pose a serious risk to social cohesion and trust in democratic systems. His solution involves the deliberate dissemination of counter-information and even the creation of false conspiracy theories to divert attention from more harmful ones. This approach seeks to dilute the impact of extreme beliefs by flooding the information space with conflicting narratives, thus weakening the influence of real dissent. Sunstein's proposal for cognitive infiltration draws sharp criticism for its ethical implications, as it blurs the line between legitimate debate and state manipulation of public discourse. By encouraging the government to engage in covert tactics to control dissent, Sunstein's model echoes earlier state programs like COINTELPRO, the FBI's covert operation from 1956 to 1971 that sought to disrupt domestic political organizations through surveillance, infiltration, and propaganda.

The Manufacture of Dissent in Digital Capitalism

In the digital age, Sunstein's model of "manufacturing dissent" aligns with how modern capitalist systems harness conflict to maintain the status quo. Scholars like Michael Chossudovsky have argued that contemporary capitalism thrives on dissent as part of its system, not as a challenge to it. In this view, dissent is encouraged and even manufactured by corporate elites to give the illusion of a functioning democracy, while real threats to the system are neutralized. Controlled protests and limited forms of opposition are tolerated to release social pressure, preventing more radical movements that could destabilize the system. Sunstein's model fits into this framework by promoting the strategic use of dissent as a way to maintain social control. In this view, the state and corporate interests benefit from a certain level of conflict and protest, as it distracts from deeper structural problems and maintains the appearance of democratic engagement.

Conclusion: The Role of Propaganda and Manipulation in Democracy

Cass Sunstein's work presents a complex view of democracy in the digital age, where manipulation, propaganda, and dissent are intertwined. While he advocates for the importance of dissent in fostering a healthy democratic society, he also endorses the use of state power to subtly manipulate public opinion for the greater good. His concept of "libertarian paternalism" represents a modern approach to social control, where individuals are nudged towards choices that align with the interests of both the state and society. Sunstein's endorsement of cognitive infiltration and the manufacture of dissent challenges traditional notions of free speech and raises important questions about the ethical limits of state intervention in public discourse. In a world where information is increasingly mediated through digital platforms, the role of the state in shaping and controlling public opinion has become more critical—and more controversial—than ever before.

The Effect of the "Lying press"(Lügenpresse)

As a representative of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas applies critical methods to media research, focusing on deviations from the "communicative mind" and identifying "systematic distortions of communication." This German critical theory emphasizes the public interest above corporate, personal, or group interests. The impact of mass media on the public sphere and national culture must be examined carefully, as every media study is commissioned by state, public, or private organizations. Ethical considerations in such research are crucial in

defining its goals and objectives. Germany's media development after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of East and West Germany provides a unique case study of the transition from media under a totalitarian regime to a free, independent media landscape. This shift represents a move from the "manufacture of consent" model, where dissent was suppressed, to a freer system where dissent is not only allowed but essential to a functioning democracy. The citizens of a united Germany now engage in free dialogue to reach consensus, marking a new phase in media evolution. The transition also highlights the emergence of the "manufacture of dissent" model in a society traditionally known for achieving consensus on critical issues. This shift reveals both the positive and negative effects of mass communication, as well as the latent dysfunctions of the system. The German experience can serve as a blueprint for understanding media dynamics in other post-socialist countries, many of which still grapple with the East-West, US-Russia, and communism-anti-communism divides.

Henning Rohl, former editor-in-chief of Central German Broadcasting (MDR), explored this transition in his 1992 book *The Power of the Message*. He noted the stark differences between the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) rigid, state-controlled media and the Federal Republic of Germany's (FRG) more open, democratic media environment. In the GDR, media strictly adhered to collective ideals and suppressed dissent, while in the FRG, citizens were responsible for creating consent through constant communication and the protection of personal rights. Rohl observed that after unification, a problematic trend emerged in Western media: the imposition of "personal opinions" as public consensus. Journalists and editors, instead of fostering unity, often pushed biased viewpoints, threatening those who disagreed with isolation or defamation. This approach led to cynicism in journalism, where bad news and conflict were prioritized for circulation, fostering public distrust in the media. Rohl also noted the dangers of the "manufacture of dissent" model, where one-sided opinions clashed, fostering division instead of unity. His concerns about the cynicism and self-interest of journalists seem even more relevant today in the age of digital media, where information is often staged to maintain the status quo. This pattern of seeking conflict to increase audience engagement has severe consequences for societal cohesion. In the chapter "Censorship and Propaganda," Rohl described American censorship of German media during the 1990 Iraq War, reflecting on how truth becomes the first casualty in war. The manipulative role of media during conflicts, where propaganda takes precedence over objective reporting, serves as a warning of the ethical dangers in journalism.

The 2014 book *Journalists for Hire* by Udo Ulfkotte further fueled public distrust in German media. Ulfkotte, a former editor of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), claimed he had been bribed by US and German intelligence agencies to write propaganda articles favorable to NATO, the EU, and the United States. His allegations, dismissed by mainstream media as conspiracy theories, nevertheless resonated with a wide audience. The book's popularity underscored growing skepticism toward official media outlets and highlighted the resurgence of the term *Lügenpresse* (False Press), which had previously been used by Nazi propaganda and student protesters in 1968. The term re-emerged in 2014 during protests by the far-right movement PEGIDA, which criticized the media for its coverage of the refugee crisis and the New Year's Eve 2016 sexual assaults in Cologne. While German public broadcasters like ZDF admitted to delayed and insufficient coverage, they framed their actions as attempts to protect social peace rather than to mislead the public. This event, however, deepened the crisis of trust between the media and the public, with many Germans turning to independent online sources for news. Surveys conducted in 2015 by Infratest Dimap, the Allensbach Institute, and Die Zeit

revealed a significant decline in public confidence in German media, particularly regarding the coverage of the refugee crisis and the conflict in Ukraine. A "Crisis of Trust" (Vertrauenskrise) emerged, with many Germans doubting the reliability of mainstream media. The rise of independent internet media, less regulated and more profit-driven, further fueled this crisis, as these outlets often prioritized conflict and dissent to drive traffic and profit.

This paradox in public communication is particularly concerning in Germany, a country with a historically well-functioning liberal-democratic media system. ZDF's admission of manipulation, while an attempt to restore trust, exemplifies the delicate balance between maintaining social peace and upholding journalistic integrity. The media's responsibility to be transparent and open with the public is critical to preserving trust and unity in society. Despite these challenges, Germany remains one of the few countries where the media is willing to admit its mistakes and engage in self-criticism. This openness is part of a broader ethical tradition in German journalism, which strives to uphold public trust and maintain societal cohesion. As digital media continues to evolve, the German model offers valuable lessons in balancing the public interest with the pressures of modern communication systems. Ultimately, the study of media effects must prioritize the public interest, ensuring that national ideals, cultural traditions, and social cohesion are respected. By applying critical methods to detect deviations from these principles, researchers can help ensure that media serves its intended role: fostering informed, engaged citizens in a democratic society.

Doublespeak and Conflict Propaganda

In his 2016 study, *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda*, Oliver Boyd-Barrett introduces the concept of "conflict propaganda" as a new form of media manipulation. Unlike traditional propaganda, which seeks to build consensus within a nation-state, conflict propaganda aims to incite division and dissent as a method of social control. During the 2014 Ukraine crisis, this approach was evident in Western media's portrayal of Russia as the enemy, which helped unite diverse social groups within certain countries. Boyd-Barrett argues that this tactic mirrors Cold War-era communication models, where the creation of an enemy was essential for maintaining public unity and justifying actions, no matter the cost. The Cold War itself was a tragic simplification, framed as a struggle between capitalism and communism. In reality, it masked deeper interests, including the exploitation of resources in the Third World. Boyd-Barrett argues that similar tactics are being used in the new Cold War online, where the Ukraine crisis has led to a polarization of global public opinion and the manufacturing of dissent. Language plays a crucial role in this, with euphemisms and dysphemisms coloring the way events and actors are portrayed, as shown in Andreana Evtimova's book *Doublespeak in Media: The Language of Political Correctness vs. Hate Speech*. Evtimova highlights how language is manipulated to both soften the portrayal of favored actions and demonize the perceived enemy. Quoting Walter Lippmann, she shows how public speech is used to manipulate not just facts but also the way they are framed, escalating political and social conflicts. Euphemisms present actions from a favorable point of view, while dysphemisms convey hostility toward others. In **Public Opinion**, Lippmann also describes how stereotypes serve as filters through which facts are twisted to align with pre-existing ideologies and prejudices. He argues that only by critically examining our own biases can we genuinely understand other perspectives without labeling them as hostile. This need for an enemy to shape one's identity is particularly evident in liberal democracies, where internal

ideological divisions lead to constant "wars of opinion" between different groups. This creates a kind of civil Cold War, characterized by exaggerated rhetoric, euphemisms, and dysphemisms, which in turn fosters moral apathy and erodes trust in societal institutions.

William Lutz, in his analysis of "Doublespeak" (a term borrowed from George Orwell's 1984), emphasizes that this manipulative political language undermines true communication. Doublespeak, he argues, is designed not to inform but to mislead, presenting lies as plausible truths. While genuine communication aims to foster understanding and build community, doublespeak serves to distort reality and erode trust in language itself. Over time, the systematic use of doublespeak can destroy the very foundation of political systems and national goals by corrupting the clarity of thought among the public. The media, while aiming to maintain its position as a trusted moral authority, often contributes to this distortion by prioritizing stories that generate tension and conflict. As Lutz notes, the use of euphemisms and dysphemisms is not only a tool for presenting events in a particular light but also a way to capture attention, even at the expense of social unity. In a media landscape where journalists are expected to take sides, unbiased reporting often fails to attract attention, leading to the dominance of sensationalized, polarized coverage. This model benefits both media outlets and political actors by solidifying divisions between various groups, reinforcing their roles as intermediaries in an increasingly fragmented society. The result is a media environment where journalists become active participants in political conflicts, often acting as biased commentators rather than neutral observers. Their coverage dramatizes events, not necessarily out of ideological commitment but in pursuit of larger audiences. This shift, driven by the commercial needs of internet media, ultimately deepens societal divisions. While propaganda has always been a tool of political control, the modern manufacture of dissent functions primarily as a commercial model, with serious consequences for social cohesion and the ability of societies to maintain unity.

The Language of Russophilia / Russophobia

In his 2016 study, *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda*, Oliver Boyd-Barrett introduces the concept of "conflict propaganda," which no longer seeks to build national consensus but instead sows division within society as a form of social control. This tactic was evident during the 2014 Ukraine crisis, where Western media painted Russia as the enemy, using this as a tool to unite disparate social groups. Boyd-Barrett argues that this approach mirrors Cold War-era communication strategies, where the creation of an enemy was essential for maintaining public unity and justifying geopolitical objectives. The Ukraine crisis illustrates how conflict propaganda polarizes global public opinion, fueling dissent. In Bulgaria, this new form of propaganda has triggered a media war, with journalists and outlets openly aligning themselves along ideological lines. The nation's media landscape became deeply polarized, particularly regarding attitudes toward Russia and the West. This division is reflected in a series of Gallup polls from 2015 to 2017, revealing that a significant percentage of Bulgarians view the United States as a security threat, while many express a preference for Russian military protection. These findings illustrate the profound geopolitical split within Bulgarian society, where historical ties to Russia clash with the country's membership in the European Union and NATO. The media in Bulgaria has played a critical role in sustaining these divisions, often mirroring the broader propaganda war between the United States and Russia. In 2017, the Foundation for Humanitarian and Social Research published a study titled *Anti-Democratic Propaganda in Bulgaria*, supported by the America

for Bulgaria Foundation. The study examined the presence of pro-Russian and anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgarian media, focusing on the use of specific linguistic markers that revealed ideological bias. It warned against the rise of a "populist front" opposing liberal democratic values and identified pro-Russian propaganda as a threat.

The methodology of the study involved tracking key terms in media articles using digital data analysis provided by SENSICA. The research identified phrases such as "corrupted elites," "American imperialism," and "Brussels bureaucrats" as indicators of anti-democratic sentiment. However, the study's one-sided approach, heavily funded by a U.S.-backed foundation, raised concerns about ideological bias. By framing pro-Russian viewpoints as inherently anti-democratic, the study implied that dissenting voices might be engaging in illegal activity—a claim bolstered by Bulgaria's criminal code, which outlaws the preaching of anti-democratic ideology. This polarized approach to media analysis exemplifies the "manufacture of dissent," a process in which opposing media discourses fuel ideological conflict rather than fostering democratic debate. The study categorized Bulgarian media into two camps: those aligned with liberal democracy and those spreading pro-Russian, anti-democratic propaganda. This stark division mirrors the Cold War-era dichotomy of communism versus anti-communism, now repackaged as a conflict between liberalism and authoritarianism. Ironically, the study's attempt to expose propaganda ended up reinforcing the very divisions it sought to critique. By labeling prominent Bulgarian journalists, public figures, and even foreign intellectuals like Jürgen Habermas and Noam Chomsky as contributors to anti-democratic discourse, the research provoked widespread dissent. The inclusion of globally respected figures like Habermas in this category highlighted the absurdity of the study's automated methodology, which lacked a nuanced understanding of the complexities of media discourse.

This case demonstrates the dangers of over-reliance on ideological bias in media research. The study's one-dimensional view of political discourse fostered a climate of division in Bulgaria, contributing to a deepening "civil Cold War" in which media outlets wage battles of opinion rather than encouraging balanced debate. The use of computer algorithms to analyze media content—without considering the broader context—underscored the risks of an automated, uncritical approach to media research. Jürgen Habermas' concept of "systematically distorted communication" is highly relevant here. In his view, pseudo-communication occurs when people believe they are expressing their own beliefs but are, in fact, following the ideological inertia imposed by others. Alan Gross expands on this idea, noting that in ideologically driven communities, even absurd actions can be justified through language manipulation. In Bulgaria's case, the manufactured dissent between media outlets serves commercial and political interests, perpetuating societal divisions rather than promoting genuine democratic dialogue.

The Bulgarian media's current state reflects the dangers of this ideological automatism. Public opinion leaders from all sides believe they are acting in the public interest, while simultaneously dismissing their opponents as misguided or manipulated by foreign propaganda. This blind allegiance to ideological positions, driven by the media's need for profit and political gain, poses a significant threat to national unity. As Habermas warned, this cycle of conflict leads to a "post-democratic sleep," where the public becomes disengaged and consent is manufactured, rather than earned through open, critical dialogue. Ultimately, the "Anti-Democratic Propaganda in Bulgaria" study serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of ideological bias in media research. It shows how the media, when driven by the need to manufacture dissent, can contribute to the erosion of democratic values by fostering division instead of encouraging constructive debate.

Media Hostility Index

In his 1963 book *On Aggression*, Austrian zoologist Conrad Lorenz argues that aggressive behavior is an instinctive part of human nature, one of the key impulses that drive behavior. Lorenz suggests that aggression between species has evolved into conflict rituals, often without physical violence, ensuring the survival of the species. This concept can be applied to the ideological battles within human societies, where groups accuse each other of grave offenses and threaten action but rarely engage in outright confrontation. These "rituals of aggression" now take place in the media, fueling continuous discord. Lorenz explores the evolutionary roots of this aggression, positing that it once served as a survival mechanism for early human groups, who faced threats from competing tribes. Over time, these aggressive instincts became embedded in human communication, where language serves not only as a tool for dialogue but also as an instrument for asserting dominance and imposing opinions. Modern media amplifies these impulses, transforming language into a vehicle for global aggression rather than peace and understanding. For Lorenz, rational appeals to curb aggression are ineffective; the instinct to focus hostility on an external group is deeply ingrained. This explains the pervasive presence of negative stereotypes toward outsiders and rival groups. Social dominance, an essential human drive, often manifests in intergroup conflict, with propaganda playing a key role in shaping the image of the "enemy." By creating a common enemy, propaganda unites a group internally while directing aggression outward. This regulation of aggression is crucial for maintaining social cohesion and strength within a group, as the constant manufacture of fear and anger keeps people mobilized against perceived threats.

Historically, aggression toward external groups has been a powerful force behind ideologies, religious wars, and expansionist policies. In the modern era, the same mechanisms of conflict propaganda are at play, particularly in the digital sphere. This has led to a resurgence of Cold War-era tactics, with global media outlets perpetuating divisions and distrust. A prime example is the ongoing media conflict between the United States and Russia, with both sides engaging in a new Cold War, using the media as an arena for ideological battles. In Bulgaria, this media conflict has escalated into what can be described as a full-scale "media war." Many journalists and outlets have aligned themselves with either the West or Russia, contributing to the deep polarization of Bulgarian society. A study titled *Anti-Democratic Propaganda in Bulgaria: Information Sites and Print Media (2013-2016)*, sponsored by the America for Bulgaria Foundation, is a striking example of how media analysis has been weaponized. This research, which employed algorithms developed by the Bulgarian company Sensika, sought to identify pro-Russian propaganda by tracking specific keywords in online publications. Similar efforts have been initiated in other Eastern European countries as part of a broader U.S.-led program, StratCom, aimed at countering Russian disinformation.

On the other side, Russian organizations like the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS) conduct similar research, using algorithms to detect anti-Russian propaganda in Western media. Both the U.S. and Russian efforts mirror the Cold War-era propaganda battles, but now the tactics have moved online. Instead of national media broadcasting from opposite sides of the Berlin Wall, the current media conflict plays out in real time across the digital landscape of Europe. Both sides claim to combat disinformation, but their methodologies reflect the same biases and ideological divides that characterized the Cold War. This new media landscape has

deepened divisions within European countries, including Bulgaria, where historical sympathies for Russia clash with alliances to NATO and the European Union. The study conducted by the Foundation for Humanitarian and Social Research is a prime example of how media analysis can exacerbate these tensions. Sponsored by the U.S.-backed America for Bulgaria Foundation, the research categorizes certain media outlets and journalists as spreading "anti-democratic" or "pro-Russian" propaganda. However, the study's one-sided approach and use of keywords to determine ideological bias reveal its role in manufacturing dissent rather than fostering balanced discourse.

The techniques used by both American and Russian organizations to study media messages lack impartiality, further inflaming tensions and perpetuating an ongoing information war. This new Cold War in the digital realm highlights the importance of studying media effects from a neutral perspective, particularly in Europe, where these ideological battles are being fought. The stakes are high for the future of European integration, and the ongoing conflict propaganda risks undermining cohesion within the European Union. The revival of Cold War-style propaganda, now adapted for the digital age, demonstrates how language continues to serve as a tool for aggression rather than understanding. Whether through U.S.-backed initiatives like StratCom or Russian efforts such as RISS's "World Mass Media Hostility Index," both sides are engaged in a battle for public opinion. In the process, they deepen societal divisions, turning media into a battleground for ideological warfare. The use of modern algorithms and media analysis tools to perpetuate conflict shows that while technology may have advanced, the underlying dynamics of propaganda remain largely unchanged.

In conclusion, the manipulation of media to manufacture dissent continues to erode trust and promote division. As conflict propaganda grows more sophisticated, the media plays an ever-greater role in shaping public perception and driving ideological conflict. The result is a polarized world where language, rather than serving as a means of dialogue, becomes a weapon in the global arena of communication. The challenge moving forward is to find ways to promote genuine understanding and dialogue, rather than perpetuating the cycles of aggression and dissent that have historically driven human conflict.

Angry Citizens of the Internet

The manufacture of dissent on the internet thrives by provoking anger. Even when it is not the product of organized conflict propaganda, this model spreads rapidly through social networks. It capitalizes on the fundamental shift in the dynamics of online media, where the passive audience is replaced by active commenters. These comments have become an integral part of media content and a source of profit. Specialized companies, known as "Blog Comment Hosting Services," have emerged to manage and monetize these comments, turning online discussions into revenue generators. Popular companies in this space include Discourse (2013), Disqus (2007), Echo (2002), IntenseDebate (2007), and Livefyre (2009). Their rise reflects the need to control and censor online comments, which are often plagued by trolling, cyberbullying, and harassment, including threats, insults, and obscene language. Many websites have opted to either shut down comments entirely or impose strict regulations requiring user registration and identification. However, controlling comments on a massive scale is resource-intensive, and smaller sites may not be able to enforce such measures. Furthermore, articles can be easily shared across social networks, where comments remain largely uncensored, allowing the manufacture of dissent to persist. This places the burden back on media administrators to

combat harmful discourse. Avoiding conflict-laden topics and presenting balanced viewpoints is one approach, but trends show that controversy and anger drive traffic more effectively than traditional journalistic ethics.

This model, based on anger and conflict, has been extensively studied. For instance, a 2014 study titled *The Nasty Effect: Online Incivility and Risk Perceptions of Emerging Technologies* highlights the decline of civility and the rise of cruelty in online discussions. Another study, *Trolls Just Want to Have Fun* (2014), shows the growing problem of online sadism. A more recent 2017 study, *Anyone Can Become a Troll: Causes of Trolling Behavior in Online Discussions*, concludes that trolling behavior can emerge in nearly any user under certain conditions. As a result, the internet may require new platforms that foster constructive communication, as the current model encourages destructive engagement. Many online comments claim to uphold moral standards, condemning violations of human rights and principles, giving users a perceived moral justification for expressing outrage. However, the rise of this moral anger in the digital age is still under-researched. Yale University's Molly J. Crockett, in her 2017 article *Moral Outrage in the Digital Age*, explores how digital media amplifies moral indignation and its social consequences. While moral outrage can be a powerful motivator to call out injustice, it can also exacerbate social divisions by dehumanizing others. This dark side of moral outrage is exploited by conflict propaganda, which inflames tensions and uses anger as a tool for social control. Digital platforms, while claiming neutrality, actively fuel these emotions for profit by incentivizing anger-inducing content that draws clicks and attention. Crockett's analysis emphasizes the need for ethical and regulatory interventions to address the growing trend of moral outrage and polarization online. Empirical research on this subject has shown that anger, more than other emotions, can drive engagement and interaction in digital spaces. A 2011 study, *Exploring Anger in the Hostile Media Process* from the University of Florida, demonstrates the connection between media bias, deliberate deviations from facts, and the resulting audience anger. Similarly, a 2013 Chinese study titled *Anger is More Influential than Joy: Sentiment Correction in Weibo* found that anger spreads more rapidly on social media than other emotions such as joy or sadness, contributing to the virality of negative news.

In another 2017 study, *An Agent-Based Model for Emotion Contagion and Competition in Online Social Media*, researcher Rui Fan finds that anger has a unique vitality online, spreading even through weaker social connections and dominating digital spaces during negative public events. The study suggests that platform managers must be aware of the contagious nature of anger and take steps to mitigate its spread, particularly during emotionally charged social crises. These findings align with Evgeny Morozov's warning in *Moral Panic Over Fake News Eats the Real Enemy—the Digital Giants*. Morozov argues that the real threat to society is not just fake news, but the way digital platforms have turned anger into a profitable business model. Instead of fulfilling their promise as spaces for democratic discourse, social networks are becoming engines of dissent and anger production, polarizing public opinion. The phrase "angry people click more" encapsulates the business model of online media and social networks in the era of digital capitalism. To safeguard national and public interests, it is crucial to understand and address this model of dissent manufacturing. Halting the exploitation of anger for profit is a necessary first step. However, the international community and individual nation-states lack the will to take meaningful action in this regard. Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen, in an interview with *60 Minutes*, revealed how the platform benefits from anger and division, stating: "Facebook's mission is to connect people all around the world. But when you have a system

that can be hacked with anger, it's easier to provoke people into anger. Publishers are saying, 'Oh, if I do more angry, polarizing, divisive content, I get more money.' Facebook has set up a system of incentives that are pulling people apart." This admission underscores the urgent need for regulatory reform to address the role that anger and division play in the online media ecosystem. Without a concerted effort to shift the business model of digital platforms away from the commodification of dissent, the internet will continue to stoke conflict, drive polarization, and undermine the potential for meaningful dialogue and consensus.

3. The Greatest Danger?

Second-Degree Cybernetics and Kayfabe

In the early 21st century, we are witnessing a new form of what Niklas Luhmann referred to as "second-degree cybernetics." This concept highlights how internet media can create a reality that people accept, even when they are fully aware of its mechanisms of manipulation. In this age, we voluntarily embrace media-driven pseudo-realities, even when we recognize the deceit. Second-degree cybernetics refers to the cybernetics of monitoring systems, where even communication researchers and sociologists can become trapped in the fictional image of society they help construct. This phenomenon mirrors the delusion found in scripted TV shows masquerading as reality formats. The term Kayfabe—originating from the world of professional wrestling in the United States—captures this idea perfectly. Kayfabe refers to a fictional reality that all participants agree to treat as authentic, even though they know it's a pretense. The key feature of Kayfabe is that everyone involved benefits from the manipulation, creating a mass delusion that serves their interests. This concept has found relevance beyond wrestling, applying to modern media and political events where the public knowingly participates in manufactured fictions. The idea of using Kayfabe in mass communication research was popularized by a 2018 YouTube video essay titled *Kanye and The End of Reality*, which highlighted how organized pseudo-communication operates in society.

In professional wrestling, Kayfabe relies on participants maintaining the illusion that scripted events are real. The audience, fully aware that they are watching a show, still chooses to buy into the spectacle. This dynamic parallels various religious, political, and social events where the audience knowingly accepts fictional narratives. It's akin to the story of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, where the public pretends to see the emperor's magnificent robes, even after it becomes obvious he's wearing nothing at all. In this case, the abstract truth—agreed upon for the sake of social cohesion—supersedes objective reality. In modern media, fiction often holds more sway than truth. A 2018 study, *The Spread of True and False News Online*, found that false news spreads faster and reaches more people than factual information. The emotional pull and novelty of fictional narratives outweigh the appeal of truth in today's media landscape. This is why dramatic television shows featuring conflict, or politicians behaving like entertainers, capture public attention more effectively than sober political analysis. As a result, politics increasingly resembles professional wrestling, where staged conflicts and controlled outcomes dominate the scene, all in the pursuit of high ratings. The "divide and rule" model thrives in this environment, where participants willingly take on roles such as the hero or villain. A notable example is Donald Trump's television career, which began in professional wrestling. His political strategy appears to follow the Kayfabe model, as seen in his public feud with CNN during the 2016 election, despite his personal friendship with CNN's Jeff Zucker before entering politics. This staged conflict benefited both Trump and CNN—Zucker even referred

to his reporters as "actors in a drama." Like professional wrestling, this media spectacle left both sides satisfied, and the audience was entertained.

The strange part of this manipulation is the audience's tacit acceptance. It's not just that a group deceives another group; the audience willingly pretends to believe the obvious falsehoods. This phenomenon has been studied extensively. Samuel Coleridge referred to it as the "suspension of disbelief," while Nazi Germany's propaganda strategists called it the *Große Lüge* (Big Lie). Walter Lippmann discussed the media's role in creating a "pseudo-environment" that manufactures consent, and Noam Chomsky critiqued this approach as fostering "necessary illusions" for the sake of public agreement. The idea of pretending to believe in a collective falsehood is further explored in Václav Havel's famous anecdote about the greengrocer, who places a communist slogan in his shop window, even though he doesn't believe in it. This type of ideological pretense is what George Orwell referred to as "doublespeak." Whether motivated by fear or personal gain, this form of pseudo-communication persists, as it maintains social order and personal advantage. Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann's "spiral of silence" theory explains how public opinion, shaped by fear of isolation, can compel individuals to accept falsehoods as truth. Niklas Luhmann added that even when we recognize the media's manipulation, we still accept the pseudo-reality it creates. The Kayfabe model thrives in modern media, where manipulation techniques attract large audiences and create a mass willing to suspend its disbelief. Facts and fiction blur in both entertainment and politics, with biographical films about political figures often being more convincing than historical records. In politics today, the Kayfabe rule—Never Break Kayfabe—dictates that the truth must never be publicly acknowledged, not just by politicians but by the public itself.

This communication model has become deeply ingrained in politics, where the truth is presented as a choice between competing propaganda narratives. Participants play their roles, from journalists and commentators to politicians and media corporations, all of whom benefit from the manufactured conflict. Unfortunately, the real casualty in this spectacle is the democratic process itself. Instead of fostering informed discourse, media-driven politics devolves into entertainment, where democracy becomes secondary to ratings. The future of this model seems bleak, as none of the key players appear interested in changing it. Dennis McQuail's ideas on the need for a new communication paradigm are more relevant than ever. The responsibility now falls on scientists and media researchers to explore communication models that resist self-imposed ignorance and seek genuine dialogue in an age dominated by Kayfabe.

Planned Obsolescence of Communication

The consent of the governed forms the foundational principle of any government, and the battle to shape public opinion and manufacture consent is ultimately a contest for political power. Every ideology begins with language, and humans live within narratives. From the dawn of civilization, *Homo sapiens* have relied on stories, myths, and tales to cooperate, build large groups, and manage internal and external threats. Scientific truth, however, is not suited for mass consumption—it serves the ruling elite and the powerful. The masses are controlled not by facts but by mythologies and ideologies. Over time, belief systems lose their power, and abstract truths decay, yet cultural inertia keeps them alive. Even without true faith in these dogmas, they continue as public bonds, functioning as banal ideologies, devoid of emotional connection or shared belief. In this culture of lies, individuals are set against one another, each

seeking privilege, power, and wealth. Civilization, having abandoned the complex scientific reality of the world, has created a simpler, pseudo-world—a realm of false news and abstract truths tailored for mass consumption. Nation-states, once the gatekeepers of truth, are losing their grip as private control over the media leads to the creation of alternate realities. In this decline of official truths, new pseudo-ontologies emerge. False news, ironically, fosters an emotional connection among people, which is the key to its popularity. Just as religions and ideologies found success through storytelling, media narratives today rely on fiction to captivate audiences.

The daily use of social media has given rise to new global communities, operating almost like ideological nations. A 2021 study, for instance, revealed that people who consume online media are significantly more suspicious of the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines than those who rely on traditional media. In the midst of a global pandemic, this trend is alarming. Yet the true winners in this moral panic are the digital corporations. Their business logic is simple: attract as many users as possible, regardless of the content's accuracy or its social impact. They apply lessons from the entertainment industry to journalism, blurring the lines between serious information and entertainment. This approach has permeated even the most developed democracies. The combination of free speech, internet technology, and market capitalism grants enormous freedom for manipulation and misinformation. The rise of "abstract truth" in media presents a profound challenge for the future of democracy. Can democracy survive in the age of digital capitalism? Change, if it comes, will have to originate within digital media itself. A new information order is possible only if it serves the interests of the tech giants who control these platforms. The dominant ideologies of the 21st century belong to the ruling class of digital oligarchs. Digital technologies have revolutionized energy efficiency, but they have also contributed to disinformation, misinformation, and a flood of obsolete, junk information. The news industry, like other sectors of late capitalism, suffers from "planned obsolescence." Just as products are designed to wear out quickly, media content is crafted to rapidly lose relevance, creating a cycle of continuous consumption. This approach, which prioritizes novelty over truth, has given rise to what can be termed "junk news." In this system, the value of news is less important than its ability to generate profit, and the dramatization of events takes precedence over factual accuracy.

The "manufacture of dissent" and the fostering of moral outrage online serve this endless craving for new content. The 2019 study led by Alexander DePaoli, *Buy Angry, Be Happy*, highlights that anger-driven consumers make more focused decisions. Anger sharpens focus and increases goal orientation, making it a valuable tool for marketing, even if it doesn't make us better citizens. Political anger, rooted in a strong belief in the common good, has been hijacked by digital media to turn users into better customers. In this global business model, dissent is manufactured to create angry people online, fueling the cycle of consumption. This communication model of planned obsolescence operates on a supranational and post-ideological level, thriving in the current system. It seems unlikely to change soon, as it is too effective to disrupt. What's needed, now more than ever, is a new communication paradigm and a revival of critical media analysis. This leads us back to the tradition of media criticism, a field long deserving of an apology. Adrian Quinn's 2017 article, *Contrary to Claims, Conventions, and Culture: An Apologia for the Glasgow University Media Group*, acknowledges the sustained contributions of the Glasgow University Media Group to media research, despite decades of misrepresentation and ridicule. The group's focus on media culture, objectivity, and impartiality remains relevant in addressing today's communication challenges.

The dream of a new world information order is not new. Since the 1980 MacBride Report, there has been little progress toward a more equitable communication system. But in 2020, hope for change began to emerge, not from politicians but from the very creators of digital media—those responsible for the problem. Former Facebook employee Frances Haugen, for example, advocates for transparency and oversight in the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), which could set global standards for regulating online platforms and curbing disinformation. Films like *The Social Dilemma* (2020) expose the dangers of the "disinformation for profit" model, featuring former tech executives who now acknowledge their role in creating this communication crisis. The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto of 2021, endorsed by over a thousand scholars and professionals, including Noam Chomsky and Jürgen Habermas, calls for public service internet platforms as non-profit alternatives to the profit-driven digital giants. This manifesto envisions a media landscape by 2040 where the ideals of the MacBride Report—information equality, consent, and understanding—are revived. It warns of the dangers posed by commercial internet platforms that prioritize surveillance, advertising, and fake news, threatening democracy and public discourse.

While these steps represent progress, the hope for dismantling the "manufacture of dissent" model remains faint. Media research has long taught us to temper expectations for rapid change in the patterns of mass communication. Reforming the media is notoriously difficult, especially from within. As Kenneth Clark observed in 1969 in his book *Civilisation: A Personal View*, human nature has changed little over the past two thousand years, and people seem doomed to repeat the same mistakes. Human communication, at its core, aims to create an accessible and orderly information system. The systematic distortion of communication, driven by the profit motives of digital corporations, undermines social progress and threatens to reverse civilization's gains. For now, hopes for change remain fragile. As Clark said, we may look to the future with optimism, but not necessarily with joy. Chaos still pays. There's money to be made in disorder, and we must confront that hard reality. As W.B. Yeats wrote in *The Second Coming*:

*"Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."*

Entropy and Natural Evil

The law of entropy, first formulated in thermodynamics, suggests that all systems tend towards disorder, disintegration, and eventual collapse. This principle is not confined to the realm of physics but can be traced within social systems, civilisations, and even language itself. If entropy represents the natural drift towards chaos and loss of structure, then linguistic entropy signifies the slow erosion of meaning, coherence, and communicative power. Language, which

binds societies together, contains within it the same inevitability of decay that affects stars, empires, and living organisms. Words lose precision, concepts blur, and over generations the structures that once conveyed profound meaning become hollow shells of expression. If entropy is chaos and the destruction of order, then evil in language becomes the symbolic incarnation of this process, representing the collapse of meaning and the disintegration of human understanding. The key question is whether entropy should be considered evil. In physical terms, entropy is indifferent: the fading of heat, the breakdown of order, the scattering of energy are neither good nor bad. But in human terms, when disorder consumes social systems, linguistic structures, or cultural life, the result is suffering. Thus entropy is experienced by humans as a form of natural evil. How societies interpret this entropy—whether as an impersonal law of nature or as the will of malevolent powers—shapes their entire worldview. If collapse is seen as natural evil, like an earthquake or a storm, then people may endure it as an unavoidable reality of existence. But if it is framed as moral evil, as the punishment of angry gods or the work of demons, then collapse acquires a meaning that binds communities through fear, awe, and obedience. The history of civilisations shows a consistent tendency to turn natural evil into moral evil. Floods, droughts, famines, and earthquakes have been personified as divine punishments. In this way, language transforms blind natural forces into moral dramas populated by gods, demons, and heroes.

The Tower of Babel story, for example, encodes the entropy of language—the inevitable scattering of words and meanings—into a tale of divine punishment. Here entropy itself becomes a metaphorical god, a principle embodied in the divine will to confuse and disperse. In this sense, gods are metaphors of entropy, symbols of the law of disorder incarnated in language. Religions often employ eschatology, the language of doom and final destiny, to channel this experience of entropy into moral frameworks. By telling stories of judgement, punishment, and destruction, societies provide meaning to suffering and bind people together in fear of collapse. Doom stories may seem destructive, yet they perform a vital social role. They remind people of their fragility, their dependence on higher laws, and their shared fate. Thus, even the most terrifying visions of the end serve to stabilise communities, offering cohesion through shared dread and expectation. From this perspective, collapse is not an aberration but a necessary renewal. Entropy ensures that no system remains permanent; languages fragment, civilisations crumble, ideas lose force. Yet in this cycle of decline new forms arise, new meanings are born, and fresh civilisations grow from the ruins of the old. Entropy as social and linguistic principle is thus not only destructive but also regenerative. The collapse of linguistic structures, for instance, clears the ground for new vocabularies, metaphors, and modes of thought. The ruin of one civilisation fertilises the growth of another. Revolutions, in this sense, are not linear progressions but literal revolvings—turnings of the wheel of order and disorder. The decisive issue is not entropy itself, which cannot be escaped, but how humans explain and accept it. When entropy is seen as part of the natural order, collapse is endured as a phase of life. When it is imagined as the work of malevolent forces, it creates fear but also a strong social glue, since the threat of moral evil unites people against a common enemy. This is why religions and mythologies so often embody entropy in fearful figures. In every case, chaos is moralised, and natural entropy is incarnated in language as the deeds of gods or devils. The danger of this moralisation lies in the way it can be manipulated. Once natural entropy is framed as moral evil, leaders and priests can control populations through fear,

dictating rituals, sacrifices, or laws meant to appease divine wrath. The true law—the slow decline of order into disorder—becomes masked by language, transformed into stories of sin and punishment. Yet at the same time, this transformation into moral evil is also what makes civilisation possible. Without eschatology, without language that gives meaning to doom and destruction, societies might dissolve into animal survivalism, bereft of higher order or shared destiny.

The paradox is that moral evil, though constructed, provides the structure necessary for human beings to live as civilised communities. Human history, then, is the history of turning natural evil into moral evil through language. Entropy, an indifferent law of nature, becomes incarnated in myths, rituals, and doctrines. This process ensures that the collapse of meaning is itself made meaningful, that the loss of order is narratively redeemed as punishment, warning, or divine necessity. Civilisations rise and fall not only through economic or military forces but through the stories they tell about entropy and evil. In the end, entropy is not evil in itself. It is the principle of decay that allows renewal, the collapse that clears the ground for new growth. But when filtered through language, entropy becomes the ultimate metaphor of evil, a symbol of disorder that both terrifies and unites. Whether seen as natural or moral, entropy remains at the heart of human existence, shaping the stories, religions, and civilisations that rise and fall in its endless cycle. The development of language and civilisation is ultimately entropic, meaning that in linguistic terms it results in the constant act of telling evil, of inventing figures of ultimate destruction to frame disorder as moral truth. Every story tends toward transgression, producing images of evil that serve as a compass for culture, guiding meaning through fear and collapse. The greatest danger for men is the one they fear the most. Which means the one they tell stories about.

'Civilization on Trial'

Arnold J. Toynbee, one of the twentieth century's most influential historians, in his book *'Civilization on Trial'* challenges the comforting belief that history is a story of linear progress and shows instead that civilisations rise and fall in recurring cycles. To ask whether history repeats itself is no longer an academic diversion but an urgent question for a civilisation that feels the ground trembling beneath it. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Europe enjoyed wealth and stability, many thinkers believed their society immune to the fate that had overtaken the Aztecs, Incas, Sumerians, or Hittites. History was for others, not for them. They imagined themselves spectators, above the stream of time, exempt from the cycles of rise and fall. This illusion was comfortable and flattering, and for ruling classes, historians, and academics it was naturally attractive. It preserved the belief that progress was inevitable and that the triumph of the most cultured peoples was permanent. Yet the events of the twentieth century have shown otherwise. Two world wars, economic collapse, and the threat of atomic destruction have demonstrated that Western civilisation is no less vulnerable than any other.

History has returned with a vengeance, and the once-dismissed question has become a matter of survival. If history repeats, does this mean we are doomed to decline no matter what we do? Or are patterns only possibilities, warnings like a navigator's chart of reefs and shoals? The answer depends on how repetition is understood. Nature shows cycles beyond dispute: day and

night, the changing of the seasons, the endless rhythm of planting and harvest. Human societies, however ingenious, remain largely subject to these rhythms. In April 1865, after the Civil War ended, former Confederate soldiers took their horses home and turned them to the plough. This act was not new, but a resumption of a pattern thousands of years old. Agriculture repeats itself because the seasons repeat. Yet the battles and the surrender that same month were different. They were not inevitable but contingent, shaped by choices and circumstances. Thus history contains both elements: repetition imposed by nature and variation created by human will. Wars, too, reveal patterns beneath their apparent uniqueness. The American Civil War resembles the wars of German unification under Bismarck: both resolved the fragility of divided federations, both produced stronger unions, and both were followed by industrial expansion that challenged Britain's supremacy. Canada's federation in 1867 offers another repetition. What seems unique in one generation reappears in another. Likewise, Britain's industrial revolution at first looked singular, but later was mirrored in Germany, America, and beyond. History, therefore, does repeat itself in significant ways, not always simultaneously but in successive waves. Civilisations themselves demonstrate the same rhythm. Some twenty have risen, flourished, and perished. Measured against the cosmic timescale, they are virtually contemporaries, brief experiments in humanity's attempt to rise above primitive existence. Their similarities in growth, breakdown, and decline suggest recurring patterns. But these repetitions need not imply determinism. Rather, they resemble nature's method of creation, in which many attempts are made, some fail, some endure, and all contribute to a larger experiment.

The repetition provides opportunity for learning as well as risk of failure. For the ruling classes and the academic guardians of orthodoxy, however, such a cyclical view is unwelcome. To admit that civilisations are subject to rise and fall is to deny the comfortable illusion of permanent supremacy. It undermines the flattering story of inevitable progress and exposes the fragility of privilege. That is why for centuries this view has been resisted: elites prefer to see their power as the culmination of history rather than a passing phase. Yet Toynbee insists that the decline of civilisations is real, and that ours is not exempt. Still, repetition is not fate. Unlike Spengler's rigid determinism, Toynbee's challenge and response model allows freedom. Civilisations arise when they meet challenges successfully; they decay when they fail. Their fate is not written in the stars but shaped by their actions. Decline, moreover, is not the end of meaning. From breakdown can come renewal: when Rome fell, Christianity endured; when China's Han empire collapsed, Buddhism flourished. Out of collapse can come new spiritual growth. History, then, may be cyclical in form, but it is not without higher purpose. Just as wheels turn while a vehicle moves forward, so human history advances through cycles of rise and fall. The suffering of civilisations can give birth to truths that endure beyond empires. This idea may not please rulers or professors, but it offers ordinary humanity a sobering hope: that meaning is not exhausted by the fate of the powerful, and that through trial and suffering the human spirit may still progress.

The Meaning of Collapse

Neema Parvini's book 'The Prophets of Doom' examines thinkers who reject the modern faith in linear progress, instead emphasising cyclical patterns of rise, decline, and collapse in

civilisations. Linear and cyclical models of history are not abstract theories but two worldviews that shape how people understand time, language, meaning, and life itself. The cyclical tradition, rooted in the ancient world, sees civilisations rise and fall like the seasons, each decline preparing the ground for renewal. The linear tradition, grounded in biblical faith, insists upon a definite beginning and end, moving history towards fulfilment. These opposing lenses determine not only how events are interpreted but also how entire cultures imagine their future. The modern belief in Progress, with a capital 'P', treats decline as a crisis, a deviation from the natural order rather than part of it. The Greeks offered the clearest articulation of cyclical collapse. Polybius's theory of Anacyclosis described monarchy turning to tyranny, aristocracy degenerating into oligarchy, democracy collapsing into mob rule, until the cycle began again with a new monarch. This vision treated states as living organisms, subject to birth, maturity, and decay.

These cyclical frameworks assumed entropy: social orders exhaust themselves and collapse, but that collapse itself enables regeneration. To accept such a worldview is to see decline not as evil or final destruction, but as part of a rhythm of life. Christianity disrupted this cyclical sensibility with a linear vision of salvation. Augustine's Six Ages of the World carried history from Adam to the Last Judgement, leaving humanity in a pessimistic sixth age of inevitable worsening until the end. Collapse here was not renewal but corruption, and salvation lay outside history. Yet even within this framework, cyclical echoes persisted. Still, the dominant Christian outlook taught that collapse was degeneration without return, binding European thought for centuries to a linear pessimism. The Renaissance reawakened the cyclical principle of renewal. Petrarch's tripartite scheme of Antiquity, Dark Age, and New Age did not reject linear salvation but infused it with revival, suggesting that societies could regenerate by drawing upon past greatness. At almost the same time, Ibn Khaldun, writing in North Africa, described how dynasties rise through solidarity and decay through luxury, their achievements inherited by successors. These independent visions reaffirmed the central principle: collapse is not terminal but the condition for rebirth. This cyclical recognition is akin to a law of social entropy: order weakens, systems fragment, but new energy gathers to restore form. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe openly embraced cyclical explanations once more. Machiavelli revived Polybius to describe the inevitable decay of constitutions, while humanists reconciled cycles with divine providence. Francis Bacon spoke of states passing through youth, maturity, and decline, yet combined this with an emergent belief in knowledge as cumulative progress. This mixture revealed the tension: an instinctive recognition of entropy and collapse, alongside a rising faith in linear advancement through science and technology.

The Enlightenment finally crystallised the linear ideal of Progress. Descartes, Newton, and Locke grounded history in natural law and human perfectibility, presenting humanity as capable of indefinite improvement. Carl Becker later described Progress as a secularised form of Providence, promising salvation not through God but through reason. Yet figures such as Bolingbroke warned that even the best governments carry the seeds of destruction, echoing the cyclical truth that collapse is inherent in all systems. This realist streak shaped the American founders, who built their republic with an awareness of eventual decline. The oscillation between linear and cyclical visions reveals how civilisations interpret not only history but their own foundations. To believe in linear Progress is to emphasise technology, science, and accumulation of knowledge as the pillars of civilisation. To believe in cyclical collapse is to

locate the core of culture in language, thought, meaning, and shared narratives. Civilisations do not endure because they master nature through science, but because they maintain a worldview that binds collective life. When that worldview weakens, entropy advances, and collapse clears the ground for renewal. Modern crises demonstrate the fragility of the linear faith. Despite advances in technology and equality, happiness has declined, instability has returned, and faith in political institutions has withered. These developments echo the warnings of cyclical thinkers from Hesiod to Toynbee: civilisations rise and fall, and collapse is part of their natural rhythm. Accepting this is not nihilism but wisdom. It means seeing decline not as an apocalypse but as a phase of renewal, where meaning and language can be reconstituted.

The two models of history thus carry profound consequences. Linear history demands optimism, reform, and belief in endless improvement, but risks blindness to decay. Cyclical history demands humility, resilience, and acceptance of entropy, but risks fatalism. Yet to understand civilisation as rooted in language, thought, and meaning rather than merely in material progress is to grasp why cycles recur: the collective imagination is the true foundation of social life. When it frays, collapse follows. When it renews, new civilisations rise. The debate between linear and cyclical visions endures because it reflects the deepest structures of human self-understanding. Civilisations live by the stories they tell about time. Whether those stories are of providential fulfilment or eternal return, they provide the framework within which languages, ideas, and meanings are forged.

Is Censorship 'Metaentropic'?

The concept of entropy, drawn from physics, describes the inevitable drift of closed systems towards disorder. When applied to the evolution of language and social life, it illuminates the tension between freedom and control that shapes human communication. Biological evolution is often seen as the growth of complexity, but this occurs only in open systems fuelled by external energy, such as the Sun sustaining life on Earth. Similarly, the evolution of language and the development of complex language depend on continual inputs of energy, attention, and cultural exchange. Without such forces, languages fragment, stagnate, or vanish, succumbing to the natural pull of entropy. If language and society obey entropic laws, then there must be mechanisms that alternately increase and decrease order by opening and closing communicative systems. When systems are open, free speech, creativity, and the uncontrolled spread of information inject novelty, diversity, and unpredictability, multiplying voices and meanings but also accelerating disorder. When systems are closed, through strict regulation, the flow of information is stabilised, variance is reduced, and meaning is consolidated, though vitality and spontaneity are often sacrificed.

Human communities therefore oscillate between openness and closure, struggling to maintain a balance between order and disorder in the evolution of language and social organisation. What sets human systems apart is the capacity for conscious intervention. Rationality directed toward power and the control of large groups functions as a metaentropic force. It acknowledges entropy, seeks to manage its effects, yet cannot abolish it. Such metaentropic awareness gives rise to laws, institutions, rituals, and linguistic regulations designed to slow disorder within specific domains while often shifting its costs elsewhere. Just as air conditioning cools a room but generates heat outside, human interventions may impose order locally while producing turbulence elsewhere. Censorship exemplifies this metaentropic dynamic. By suppressing

forms of speech or public communication deemed harmful, dangerous, or offensive, censorship narrows the system, reducing unpredictability and slowing disorder. It has existed for centuries, enacted by governments, private institutions, or even individuals through self-censorship. Historically, censorship has been justified to protect children, safeguard vulnerable groups, preserve public order, and ensure national security. For example, in times of war governments have censored information to prevent unrest or aid to enemies, presenting censorship not as suppression but as protection. Advocates argue that hate speech, propaganda, and incitements to violence demand restrictions to preserve dignity and safety, particularly for marginalised groups. Yet the opposite force, free speech, deliberately opens systems to disorder by allowing every voice and perspective to be heard. It is seen as the cornerstone of democracy because it permits dissent, critique, and accountability.

Critics of censorship highlight the danger of the slippery slope: once censorship is accepted in one domain, it expands into others, silencing legitimate voices and undermining freedom. Censorship is also often ineffective, driving dangerous ideas underground, where they may acquire the allure of forbidden truth. It can be exploited by those in power to conceal information, manipulate opinion, or stifle opposition, ultimately weakening the democratic process itself. In this light, censorship may slow disorder locally but risk generating deeper instability by eroding trust in authority. History illustrates these tensions. Socrates was executed in 399 BC for corrupting the youth and impiety, having refused to censor his teachings. His fate shows the lethal consequences of silencing dissent. Yet his student Plato, in *The Republic*, argued that dangerous ideas should be suppressed for the sake of order. Euripides, by contrast, defended liberty of speech as the right of freeborn men. Centuries later, Sweden became the first country to abolish censorship by law in 1766, establishing modern legal precedent for free expression. These contrasting positions reveal how societies continually shift between openness and closure, order and disorder, in response to perceived threats. In the present, liberal democracies proclaim free speech yet often suppress language judged extremist, intolerant, or offensive. The paradox is that in defending liberal values, they adopt practices that resemble totalitarian censorship. Even satire or offensive humour may become targets of suppression. What was once condemned as propaganda now returns under names such as public relations or strategic communications, and censorship itself appears in forms labelled fact-checking, anti-misinformation, or content moderation. These terminological shifts reveal an Orwellian tendency to reshape meaning and justify new forms of control. Social media platforms magnify the dilemma: private corporations exercise vast power to moderate speech without transparency, effectively controlling public discourse under the guise of safety. This raises the question of whether censorship is ever truly necessary, or whether it is best understood as a metaentropic tactic: a conscious intervention that slows the pace of disorder within closed systems of communication, while its opposite, free speech, opens the system to greater disorder. Both are essential forces in human communities.

Censorship curbs diversity to preserve stability, while free speech expands diversity but accelerates unpredictability. Neither can escape the law of entropy, yet both regulate its rhythm within the fragile domain of language. The evolution of language, then, is neither wholly entropic nor wholly anti-entropic. It is shaped by metaentropic forces that recognise entropy, seek to manage its effects, and embody the human struggle to balance order and disorder. Censorship and free speech are two opposing tactics in this struggle: one closing systems to preserve stability, the other opening them to ensure vitality. Censorship is metaentropic because, while it cannot abolish disorder, it consciously seeks to slow entropy within a closed

linguistic system, preserving stability for power by narrowing expression even as it risks generating instability elsewhere.

*'It is often a strategic mistake to silence a man,
because it leaves the world under the impression
that he had something to say'.
-G.K. Chesterton*

Toynbee Against Progress

Censorship and smear campaigns ("flak") are both methods used to control information, silence dissent, and manipulate public discourse. The term "flak" has been used in 1988 book 'Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media' by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky to describe the efforts to discredit organizations or individuals who disagree with or cast doubt on the prevailing assumptions favorable to established power. Censorship and "flak" imposed by governments and ruling elites may be understood as a form of antientropic control. In a relatively closed linguistic system, power relies on regulating communication and restricting ideas in order to slow disorder and preserve the status quo. By narrowing the flow of meanings, censorship delays the inevitable pull of entropy, creating a temporary stability that benefits existing authority. Yet forces that challenge this order, especially cyclical theories of history and warnings of moral or cultural decay, act as metaentropic disturbances. They recognise entropy, expose decline as inevitable, and thereby accelerate disorder. Such ideas are dangerous to any system that depends on linear progress for its legitimacy, for they threaten to open the closed system and hasten the very collapse it fears. It is in this light that the attack on Arnold J Toynbee becomes comprehensible, even inevitable.

As Neema Parvini recounts in 'The Prophets of Doom', Toynbee was one of the most celebrated historians of the twentieth century. His twelve-volume 'A Study of History' presented a sweeping account of civilisations rising and falling through challenge and response. This cyclical vision challenged the modern faith in linear progress, particularly cherished by the ruling elites of Britain and America. For governments engaged in post-war reconstruction and Cold War competition, progress was not merely an intellectual idea but the foundation of political legitimacy. The notion that Western civilisation might follow the same trajectory of decline as Rome or Byzantium was intolerable. Toynbee's insistence that collapse was not only possible but inevitable struck at the heart of the progressive myth. Hugh Trevor-Roper's savage review of Toynbee must be read against this background. Appearing in Encounter, a magazine secretly funded by MI6, the CIA, and the British government's Information Research Department, his attack was less an act of scholarship than a calculated intervention in cultural warfare. Trevor-Roper, tied to the intelligence establishment since his service in MI6 during the war, denounced Toynbee's work as illogical, irrational, and even messianic. He mocked him as a prophet of doom, comparing his style to Hitler, and imagining a future cult worshipping him after an apocalypse. Such ridicule was designed not only to diminish Toynbee's intellectual standing but also to brand cyclical history as absurd and dangerous. The political context is crucial. Britain, struggling with imperial decline, and the United States, asserting itself as leader

of the free world, required confidence that their civilisation was unique, rational, and destined to endure.

The ideology of progress was both shield and weapon in this effort. Toynbee's model threatened this narrative by suggesting that Western civilisation was subject to the same laws of rise and fall as every other. In entropic terms, his vision implied that disorder was inevitable, that the apparent order imposed by modern progress was temporary, and that no amount of censorship or control could prevent eventual decline. Such a message was intolerable, for it risked unleashing disorder within the carefully managed system of Cold War propaganda. Trevor-Roper's attack, therefore, was a metaentropic act of suppression. By ridiculing Toynbee in a global forum, the cultural apparatus of power sought to slow the spread of dangerous ideas that might destabilise belief in progress. The ferocity of the critique reflected the danger his work posed to the closed system of post-war ideology. For the ruling classes, faith in progress was not simply optimism but a survival mechanism. To concede the cyclical nature of history would have been to admit that Western power could fade like any other civilisation. Yet cyclical theories carry their own peril. They function as metaentropic accelerants, reminding societies that decline is natural and unavoidable, which may lead to resignation, radical action, or apocalyptic visions. In a culture built on progress, such warnings appear as prophecy of revolution or revelation, opening the system to disorder at precisely the moment when it seeks to close itself against entropy.

Toynbee's work, then, was both historically profound and politically dangerous. It challenged the censorship of official narratives by insisting that civilisations rise and fall, and that the West was not immune. That he was attacked so savagely is, in this sense, normal and consistent with natural laws of order and disorder. Just as entropy compels systems to protect their temporary stability, so power seeks to suppress voices that reveal its fragility. Toynbee's fate illustrates this dynamic with clarity. His cyclical history unsettled the myth of progress, and so he was cast as scapegoat, burdened with truths society refused to bear. The campaign to discredit him reflects less on his work than on the anxieties of an age determined to believe in progress at any cost. It is strikingly ironic that, long before the Internet's Godwin's law, Trevor-Roper cast Toynbee alongside Hitler, as if invoking the symbol of ultimate evil was enough to brand his cyclical vision of history as dangerously subversive.

Society's Burden On the Self

'What society does to people?' asks sociologist Richard Sennett in his 2018 interview for SRF Sternstunde Philosophie. The troubled relation between society and people has long been at the centre of social thought, not in biological terms but in how individuals create meaning under hostile conditions. As societies expand in size and complexity, the burden placed upon the self becomes increasingly heavy. In the present age of artificial intelligence, automation and global instability, this tension intensifies: systems that once offered continuity now erode stability, corrode identity and fracture life into incoherence. The self is pressed down beneath proliferating structures of society, compelled to hold together meanings that keep dissolving. Capitalism has sharpened this fragmentation. Where once careers provided a life arc—beginning with apprenticeship, growing through practice and ending in mastery—now

discontinuity prevails. Short-term contracts, unstable jobs and the absence of guarantees reduce existence to fragments. With each technological layer, the weight on the individual grows heavier.

The self no longer faces one burden but a mass of overlapping pressures: unstable economies, impersonal bureaucracies, endless information streams. Automation compounds the crisis, threatening entire categories of labour. Political discourse often misdirects this anxiety towards scapegoats such as immigration, yet the deeper injury lies in the fact that many people are rendered surplus. To be considered unnecessary by society is not only an economic dispossession but also a profound attack on dignity. The larger and more intricate society becomes, the more individuals risk being treated as disposable units. Rewards and recognition vanish in such a system. A driver who spends years labouring for a digital platform receives no honour for service or dedication; work is reduced to cost. Even monotonous factory routines once contained sources of dignity through craft, collegiality and collective resistance. Under atomised, machine-monitored labour, even these fragile forms of pride are stripped away. Society expands in scale, yet the self feels hollowed out, emptied of meaning, a vessel drained by demands it cannot resist. Cooperation, which once relieved this weight, is also undermined. Musical performance shows how strangers can achieve harmony through gestures, listening and rhythm; tacit cooperation sustains dignity and belonging. By contrast, algorithmic labour imposes rigid commands, reducing collaboration to mechanical compliance. The social burden multiplies without being shared. Urban life reflects this paradox as well. Crowds can stimulate and connect, yet when cities are segregated and carved into single-use zones by international capital, they suffocate openness. Markets where diverse groups mix, schools at community borders, and public parks allow difference and lessen strain. Yet rigid master plans stifle complexity, replacing fluid adaptation with sterile order. The heavier the social design, the more it crushes the self beneath its weight. The aim is not utopia but a society that does not destroy meaning.

Open systems allow multiple solutions and provide breathing space, while rigid systems suffocate. Yet even the most open designs cannot erase the law that the more society multiplies in number and complexity, the greater the burden on the self to hold coherence together. Decline is not the work of conspiracy but an inevitable phase in civilisation's cycle. Language, art and storytelling reveal this clearly. As language loses stability, as meanings collapse and taboos are broken, the self struggles to survive and to maintain coherence within disorder. Vulgarisation, appetite for horror and fascination with destruction are not accidents but symptoms of the pressure mass society imposes. The more forms of society multiply, the more language bends toward distortion and loss of clarity, dragging the self further into confusion. Society burdens the self not only materially but linguistically. The larger and heavier it grows, the more alienation, suffering and violence it generates, but also the more invention, myth and art it compels into being. Civilisation is both a prison and a workshop: it shackles the individual, yet also forces transformation of burden into fleeting forms of dignity. The self is never free of this weight. It staggers beneath society's complexity yet turns the pressure into stories and narratives that make life momentarily bearable. What society does to people, then, is to shape their capacity for meaning. It corrodes or sustains their narratives, impoverishes or enriches their everyday lives. The bigger society becomes, the heavier the burden laid on the self, stretched

across abstractions it cannot inhabit. There is no cure for this condition. Mass society either collapses or the self gradually dissolves into the empty circulation of its language.

The Great Beast of Society

In her article ‘Simone Weil: Beauty and the Great Beast’, Fiona Brettel revisits Simone Weil’s warning about the tyranny of collective opinion and the ways in which people are subdued by forces they scarcely notice. The great beast, first described by Plato and later taken up by Weil, has grown beyond metaphor. It is institutionalised, bureaucratised, and amplified through official discourse. This beast rules through fear, creating images of evil and presenting them as constant. Language instructs people to fear, and through repetition menace becomes normalised until individuals are enslaved not only by opinion but by an atmosphere of dread. Weil believed beauty interrupts this cycle, piercing habit and restoring attention to reality. Beauty opens a glimpse of the sacred, yet in modern discourse the opposite occurs: alarms saturate attention until the sacred vanishes. Language clouds perception, constructing a culture where reality itself is defined by threat. Plato’s allegory of the beast remains striking. He warned that the masses, like a beast, respond with approval or anger, and those who manipulate these reactions call it knowledge. Modern societies elevate this skill into the industries of propaganda, advertising, politics, and media. Fear is the most efficient instrument. The beast is not only the crowd but also the language that keeps the crowd aware of its fragility. Brettel stresses Weil’s insight that collectivity imitates the sacred but produces only a counterfeit. Fear binds people together under the sign of menace. To fear together is to belong together. Public discourse seeks less to reveal truth than to secure cohesion, which is maintained by naming and renaming dangers. Weil noted that the sacred lies beyond both the individual and the collective, yet she recognised the immense weight of opinion.

Language makes resistance almost impossible. Words repeated by teachers, officials and journalists shape both thought and imagination. Once a threat is named, even sceptics live within its frame. Fear is not merely communicated but imposed as environment. Repeated threats cease to shock yet linger as the background of daily life. People adapt to catastrophe as though it were permanent. Fear becomes rhythm. Weil observed that collective opinion dominates not through argument but constancy. Persuasion is unnecessary when menace is inescapable. Heidegger’s idea of the anonymous ‘they’ clarifies this further. Official discourse removes the chance of experiencing the world differently. People learn to speak in terms dictated by fear, to interpret events as threats, to read history as calamity. Ordinary conversation is saturated with menace. Fear becomes the house of language, and language the cage of the self. Plato’s image of the beast’s keeper is also apt. The keeper knows only how to manage moods, calling good what pleases the beast and evil what angers it. Modern institutions act in this way, adjusting narratives not to reflect truth but to preserve fear. They pose as guardians yet rely on menace to justify authority. Their skill is feeding dread.

Weil deepened this critique by noting that under such conditions agreement feels like duty, while dissent appears as sin. To doubt the proclaimed threat is to seem reckless or treacherous. Fear not only unifies but polices. It demands conformity of language. Conformity, Weil

explained, is a counterfeit of grace. Life under such conditions is guided not by pursuit of the good but by avoidance of ruin. Identity is forged not in relation to truth but to menace. To exist in such a society is to inhabit the shadow of the beast. The beast is not external; it is lodged in imagination and speech. Weil argued that only beauty and openness to the sacred can lift humanity above collective domination. Yet when language itself manufactures evil, beauty is mistrusted. What remains is a population habituated to dread, reassured by the constancy of menace. The final outcome is the naturalisation of fear. People cease to imagine life without danger; they accept danger as life itself. This is the beast's triumph: evil need not exist as described, for its anticipation already becomes reality. Public discourse has become the beast's voice. Words no longer reflect reality but create it, saturating life with menace. Fear of collapse and destruction forms the foundation of collective existence. Under such conditions, the self lives beneath the rule of the greatest beast: the culture of fear generated by language, so pervasive it appears simply as the way things are.

The Spiral of Consent

Hobbes's Leviathan, pictured on the cover of his book, is not a ruler in the ordinary sense but a monstrous body formed of countless smaller people, fused into one giant figure. This image conveys the paradox of power: the sovereign is not truly autonomous but the product of those who submit to him, a construct woven from their consent and fear. A similar motif appears in the Persian tale of the birds seeking a king. After long trials, they discover that the Simurg they awaited is nothing other than themselves in collective form. Václav Havel reinterpreted this allegory in 'The Power of the Powerless'. Under communism, he argued, every individual was implicated in sustaining domination. His example of the greengrocer who obediently displayed a slogan demonstrates how a trivial act of conformity preserves safety but also nourishes oppression. There is no innocence in such a system: everyone contributes to the power they dread, everyone sustains the Leviathan they believe rules over them. This irony is captured by a Soviet joke in which Brezhnev, confused at a modern art exhibition, remarked that he must 'ask at the top' for an opinion—forgetting that he himself was at the top. The joke exposes the ruler as servant to something larger: the collective will, or what Plato called the beast of opinion.

This beast is not flesh but speech, composed of repetition, belief, and convention. Hobbes framed society as a covenant generating authority, but it is more accurate to see society as language solidified into power. The Leviathan exists only because people speak as if it does, fusing themselves into a monster of shared illusion. The theory of the spiral of silence, proposed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, makes this mechanism explicit. She argued that fear of isolation drives individuals to monitor their environment through what she termed a quasi-statistical organ, sensing the climate of opinion and adjusting speech accordingly. Those who think themselves in the minority remain quiet; those who think themselves in the majority speak loudly. Media magnifies these tendencies, creating feedback loops that exaggerate certain views and suppress others. The result is not a mirror of reality but a reshaping of perception. Public opinion becomes a coercive force, silencing dissent without visible compulsion. Pluralistic ignorance reinforces the spiral. People may privately disagree with a norm yet assume others accept it, and so they conform outwardly. An illusion of unanimity arises: all appear to agree

because none dare contradict. This makes the beast of opinion appear invincible, not because it is real but because silence preserves its mask. Solomon Asch's conformity experiments revealed how individuals prefer false agreement to isolation. The fear of exclusion fuels silence, and silence then strengthens authority.

The spiral is not politically neutral. Noelle-Neumann, once connected to Nazi propaganda, had seen how suppression of dissent and endless repetition could transform lies into accepted reality. Goebbels's dictum that a big enough lie, repeated often enough, becomes truth shows how indoctrination fuses voices into a single chorus. In such conditions, individuality vanishes into the collective, and the Leviathan speaks with one tongue. Institutions such as schools, media, and state apparatus serve as organs of this voice, training sameness and obedience until difference itself is labelled a threat. Simone Weil warned that this is not communion but the counterfeit of the sacred. True transcendence belongs neither to individual nor to collective, but the imitation of the sacred enthrones society as ultimate power. The beast of society is only the echo of countless voices repeating the same words, but its power is immense. Those who echo them fear silence more than they value truth. Public opinion becomes the true Leviathan, an imagined body sustained entirely by language. The spiral of silence reveals that opinion is not simply an aggregate of beliefs but the outcome of fear, perception, and the longing for belonging. Hobbes's Leviathan and Noelle-Neumann's spiral meet at the same insight: society is a beast made of speech, a covenant of conformity maintained not by chains but by repetition and silence. The ruler, like Brezhnev in the anecdote, is not master of this beast but its servant, compelled to consult it before speaking himself. And each citizen, from Havel's greengrocer to the bird seeking the Simurg, is woven into the monster they imagine commands them. The conclusion is stark: society is a linguistic creation, and the beast of public opinion is its most terrifying offspring, a Leviathan whose body is made not of flesh but of silence.

Ozzy's Beast

In the cultural landscape of the 1980s, fascination with transgression reached an unsettling climax when Ozzy Osbourne openly reflected on the power of charisma, citing Adolf Hitler as its most terrifying embodiment. In a candid interview he admitted, 'Adolf Hitler had a charisma, in a bad way, and I kind of admired him... not for what he was, but for people... if somebody put that in a positive way, for the good of mankind...'. These words shocked because they exposed a disturbing paradox: the same force that seduced millions into destruction might also be redirected toward connection. What Ozzy revealed, perhaps unconsciously, was that charisma itself is morally neutral, a channel of magnetism that can devastate or redeem depending on how it is deployed. His invocation of Hitler summoned the ultimate image of destructive magnetism, but he sought to invert it, suggesting that such power could be repurposed for art, catharsis, and a form of community. In so doing, he presented himself as a kind of reverse Leviathan: not a sovereign demanding submission but an entertainer drawing strength from devotion while offering that energy back to his audience. Even when his songs invoked destruction, madness, or occult themes, he claimed to dedicate his life and art to people, insisting that he gave his 'life, soul, and everything' for their enjoyment. Rock music in this light became the theatre of charisma, where the language of menace was not suppressed but refracted into performance.

The Beast was summoned on stage, not to command obedience but to transmute fear into spectacle, giving audiences both thrill and release. Ozzy's embrace of theatrical evil thus reveals the cultural fascination with danger as well as the human need to tame it through ritualised display. By acknowledging Hitler's charisma, Ozzy underlined that society cannot escape its enthrallment to fear's magnetism; yet by confining that magnetism to the stage he suggested an alternative path, a way of converting destructive allure into collective experience without political catastrophe. His admission deserves comparison with Charlie Chaplin's portrayal of Hitler in 'The Great Dictator'. Chaplin exposed the dictator through parody, mocking his gestures and voice while delivering a closing speech for peace so moving that he later repeated it at rallies in America. But in crossing into overt politics, Chaplin became entangled in ideological battles, aligning with communism and eventually facing exile. Ozzy never risked that turn. He kept the Beast as a creation of music, persona, and performance, resisting the temptation to wield charisma as political authority. The difference is telling: while Chaplin's message was censored by ideology, Ozzy's spectacle endured because it remained confined to entertainment. His Beast lived only in the glow of stage lights, not in parliaments or governments. The broader implication is that charisma, whether embodied in dictators, actors, or rock stars, is inseparable from language. Words, slogans, and performances do not simply describe reality; they create it. They fill it with danger, with evil, or with possibility. To invoke Hitler, as Ozzy did, is to reveal that the greatest Beast survives in speech itself, endlessly recycled as symbol and warning. Godwin's law, the observation that every discussion eventually references Nazis or Hitler, testifies to this enduring presence.

The spectre of destructive charisma haunts collective imagination, and its invocation exerts a fascination that unites people through fear as much as through admiration. Simone Weil argued that fear can masquerade as the sacred, binding people together in counterfeit communion. Ozzy's words show how charisma functions in a similar way: it is an energy that enslaves when wielded politically but can liberate when channelled artistically. By taking the darkness of history's most infamous figure and turning it into stage performance, Ozzy transformed fear into ritual, allowing audiences to experience danger without succumbing to it. The conclusion is striking: society is bound to the Beast of charisma and fear, but its form depends on how language and performance shape it. In politics, it enslaves; in art, it may redeem. Ozzy's Beast thus reminds us that the image of ultimate evil, once named, never disappears—it persists as a haunting presence in speech, an eternal magnet for attention, fascination, and dread.

Eternal Return of Evil

From the earliest myths to contemporary media, the image of ultimate evil has provided the foundation upon which collective narratives are constructed. Human beings seem unable to develop moral systems or communal identities without positioning at their centre a threatening figure that embodies the antithesis of goodness. This 'evil pole' functions as the negative orientation of the moral compass, without which the concept of good becomes hollow. Ancient mythologies abounded with monsters, demons and adversarial gods whose value was not confined to their deeds but extended to their symbolic role in sustaining order and social cohesion. Where such a figure did not exist naturally, it was imagined, and where it could not be embodied, it was projected into abstract symbols. A striking modern instance is J. R. R.

Tolkien's invention of the 'Eye of Sauron', not a literal organ but a hovering image of unblinking malice. Its terror derives not from physical action but from the dread of relentless surveillance and inevitable destruction. Even when empty, such symbols of evil remain effective because they evoke fear, and fear binds individuals into a collective, uniting them against a perceived danger.

This logic persists in modern culture, where the names Hitler or Nazi serve as shorthand for ultimate evil. Their invocation is sufficient to command attention, shape arguments, and create immediate cohesion against a common enemy. Godwin's law exemplifies this in digital communication, stating that as any online discussion lengthens, the probability of comparison to Hitler or the Nazis approaches certainty. First formulated by Mike Godwin in 1990 as a caution against trivialising the Holocaust, the adage endures because it reflects the symbolic power of Hitler as the archetypal embodiment of evil. Even when employed superficially, such references perform the ancient function of uniting people through fear and offering the necessary counterweight to morality. Efforts to suppress such analogies cannot remove the deeper cultural need for a focal image of evil. Without such a figure, societies face difficulty in telling stories, binding individuals together or justifying collective action. From mythical monsters to Tolkien's Eye of Sauron, from demonic adversaries to Hitler invoked in casual debate, the role is constant. The creation of evil, whether in embodied form or in abstract symbolism, is not accidental but structural, a mechanism through which human beings stabilise meaning, draw boundaries and sustain communities. Fear of evil unites more powerfully and more immediately than appeals to love, and it continues to frame the stories that societies tell about themselves. Appetite for destruction became an art form. From the late 1970s punk movement to contemporary celebrity culture, artists have repeatedly employed the provocative strategy of invoking Hitler, wearing swastikas or adopting fascist imagery in order to shock, offend and capture attention. These gestures were not endorsements of ideology but performances of anarchy and destruction designed to forge identity through outrage. Billy Idol observed that British punks such as Siouxsie Sioux wore swastikas not as political declarations but as performance art, a way of confronting society with its own authoritarian tendencies and unsettling audiences unable to separate provocation from genuine belief. Vivienne Westwood went further by combining Nazi and communist imagery in punk fashion, mocking political dogmas and challenging a conservative culture with symbols it could neither ignore nor assimilate comfortably. The result was scandal, and scandal itself became a form of belonging for those drawn to this performance of nihilism.

Decades later, Kanye West's public admiration of Hitler echoed this method in a different arena, where controversy is a means of gaining attention and mobilising communities through fascination and outrage. What unites these diverse cases is not the content but the method: the calculated exploitation of ultimate evil to attract followers. These actions collapse the boundary between art and taboo, trading on the power of the forbidden. Their appeal lies in the audacity to say what should remain unsaid, to display what society insists must stay hidden, transforming outrage into identity. Followers united by their rejection of conventional morality find cohesion in what horrifies or disgusts others. At its core this is an appetite for destruction channelled through art, not of physical structures but of boundaries, taboos and fragile consensus around morality. By invoking Hitler, wearing swastikas, or otherwise manipulating the image of evil, artists access the dark side of charisma to construct belonging and spectacle. The power lies not

in ideological message but in the magnetism of the act itself, producing communities held together by fascination with destruction rather than by love or virtue. Punk and its cultural successors reveal a deeper truth: art that harnesses the image of ultimate evil continues to shock, attract and bind people together, converting the darkest symbols into instruments of attention, cohesion and identity.

Beethoven and Rammstein

When Ludwig van Beethoven premiered his Ninth Symphony in Vienna in 1824, Europe was under repression as monarchies and old orders resisted the revolutionary upheavals of the previous century. The music, however, with its choral setting of Friedrich Schiller's 'Ode to Joy', seemed to call for something beyond empires, towards a vision of universal brotherhood. Schiller's text imagined a humanity bound by friendship, joy and freedom, and Beethoven, himself disdainful of authoritarian power, gave this vision a soaring musical form. For most listeners and institutions, the Ninth has since been received as a hymn to human dignity and unity. Yet as Slavoj Žižek shows in his film *A Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, such universality is never neutral. The Ninth functions as what he calls an ideological container, endlessly adaptable to causes across the spectrum, from liberation to oppression. Žižek illustrates this by tracing the disturbing history of its appropriations. The Nazis deployed it at their rallies, the Soviet Union remade it as a communist anthem, and during the Chinese Cultural Revolution it was permitted even as most Western music was banned. In Rhodesia it became an anthem for white supremacy, while far-left revolutionary Abimael Guzmán of the Shining Path declared it his favourite work. It was used when a divided Germany competed as one team at the Olympics, and later enshrined as the anthem of the European Union. In each case, the same exalted chorus to joy and brotherhood served contradictory purposes.

Žižek argues that this capacity to embody opposites reveals its perverse ideological function: it becomes a soundtrack for a fantasy of universal fraternity so broad that even dictators and terrorists could embrace one another under its banner. Stanley Kubrick grasped this when he centred the Ninth in *A Clockwork Orange*. For Alex, the film's delinquent protagonist, Beethoven's music embodied exaltation corrupted by violence, beauty intertwined with cruelty. The Ninth thus exposes the paradox of celebrating unity while concealing exclusion. When a text proclaims 'all humanity', Žižek insists, one must ask who is excluded. Beethoven himself stages this musically. The choral finale opens with a glorious affirmation of joy but is soon disrupted by carnival rhythms, vulgar tones and grotesque interruptions. Rather than a simple hymn to unity, the Ninth reveals ideology's impossibility, exposing the dissonant forces it seeks to suppress. Žižek's interpretation reconfigures how audiences experience the Ninth. The profound sense of being moved may be a response not to a fixed truth but to an ideological void, an empty frame that can accommodate any content. This explains why it has served Nazis, communists and European liberals alike: it dictates no single meaning but provides the structure within which meanings flourish. Its beauty lies not only in musical achievement but also in its exposure of ideology's duplicity. The Ninth can thus be heard as a critique of ideology itself, revealing both the allure and instability of universal claims, a perverse joy that unsettles every political appropriation. In *A Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek extends this reading to the German band Rammstein. Often accused of flirting with fascist aesthetics, Rammstein

incorporate in their performances the gestures, poses and energies once central to Nazi spectacle. Yet Žižek argues that their work demonstrates how such elements can be detached from ideology and enjoyed in a pre-ideological form. In songs like *Reise, Reise*, martial rhythms, militaristic gestures and dark spectacle appear not as affirmations of fascism but as pure theatricalised enjoyment, fragments of desire without ideological content. Rammstein achieve a suspension of the Nazi horizon of meaning. By staging these elements without their original baggage, they allow audiences to revel in their intensity while undermining the project that once mobilised them. The strategy is not to censor symbols or bury gestures of power but to exaggerate them, release them into parody and collective enjoyment.

In this way, Žižek suggests, Nazism is subverted from within, not by denial but by reclaiming its seductive fragments and stripping them of ideological force. This insight reflects his wider claim about ideology. Every ideology seduces through small bribes: chants, rituals, promises, the pleasures of belonging condensed into performance. These fragments purchase loyalty by masking violence with enjoyment. By exposing and rendering them excessive or ridiculous, art can reveal ideology's mechanism and disarm its appeal. Rammstein's performances exemplify this paradoxical resistance: not denunciation but excess, turning dangerous elements into liberated art. The effect mirrors Žižek's point that ideology depends not only on lies but on enjoyment, the visceral thrill that binds people to fantasies. To dismantle ideology requires confronting not only its falsehoods but also its pleasures, and in this sense Rammstein's spectacle offers a lesson in how to resist by transforming ideology's darkest seductions into liberating forms of collective experience. It is capitalism's empty frame of ideology.

I'm Gonna Fail in Sin City

The modern metropolis is not simply a collection of buildings, roads and institutions but a linguistic creation, a shared story that shapes how it is imagined and lived. What defines a city is not its skyline or geography but the words spoken about it, the narratives through which its meaning is circulated. A city exists in the collective mind, woven into discourse by those who inhabit it or those who dream of joining it. Even when cities are described as filthy, menacing and filled with hostile strangers, such images only heighten their allure. The negative vision acquires a romantic aura, amplified through cinema, literature and popular music. It becomes a mythology of rebellion and temptation, a promise that life in the city may be dangerous yet meaningful. This is why millions are drawn each year to places that symbolise both menace and possibility, convinced that amid the ruins of order they may find their own story. Yet behind the mythology lies the darker truth of life in large cities. The metropolis is hazardous not only in terms of physical safety but also for mental well-being. Crime, alienation and density create conditions in which anxiety and despair thrive.

Still, the city possesses borders, and those who cross them experience the paradoxical comfort of belonging to something larger: the fragile idea of civil society. Among all examples, Manhattan appears as the quintessential city, an island whose edges are clear, yet within those edges a collective organism thrives, functioning at once as beacon and trap. Its sinister image attracts because it mirrors the scale of modern civilisation itself, a society whose greatness and corruption grow in tandem. The growth of society always amplifies both creativity and evil.

Invention and cruelty, generosity and exploitation, suffering and delight, all swell with numbers. Evil in particular flourishes through repetition. The horror of a serial killer is not a single crime but the pattern of violence returned again and again. Likewise, the expansion of the metropolis magnifies crime, exploitation and destruction, a perpetual warning against the towers of concrete and stone where millions are pressed together. Experiments with rat populations in conditions of density and abundance revealed collapse and cannibalism, an echo of the entropy that haunts urban life. Beneath the surface lies an even harsher truth: civilisation rests on language, and language itself is fragile. A society is its *lingua franca*, yet language functions only for a time before meanings shift, decay and collapse. The very word 'subject' reveals the duplicity of language: it meant both one who is spoken of and one who is subdued under authority. By the early modern period it was reshaped into 'subjective', at first denoting obedience, later redefined by Kant as the realm of personal experience. What was once submission became individuality. These shifts are not natural growth but signs of how language manipulates, creating new meanings to sustain power.

When meanings disintegrate, civilisation falters, as Robert Musil portrayed in *The Man Without Qualities*, where an empire in decline searched libraries for new ideals but found none. Yet the collapse of Vienna was followed by the rise of Berlin, and the ruin of Berlin by the emergence of another order. Apocalypse is always revelation: the language of power exposed as hollow, yet endlessly capable of being filled again. Cities endure for centuries because they preserve this vessel, carrying the language of power across regimes and revolutions. Proverbs reminds that death and life lie in the power of the tongue, and language ensures continuity as much as destruction. Entropy governs, yet language persists as the medium of control. There is no return to villages or tribes, no path back to innocence. Civilisation renews itself without end, and each cycle brings a utopian dream of global unity that fails, because no single language can hold it together. The city becomes the new jungle, a natural habitat produced by civilisation itself, filled with new beasts—forces of society beyond the mastery of any one individual. This cycle of language, power and collapse has been told in myth, philosophy, religion and art, from Greek tragedies to Tolkien's dark lands, from Beethoven's symphonies to Ozzy Osbourne's defiant performances. Modern life recognises its fate in this darkness, singing not of victory but of both ecstasy and ruin: 'I'm gonna fail in sin city.' To accept this destiny is to embrace what Nietzsche named *amor fati*, to find joy in affirming even the collapse that shadows every civilisation, and to see in failure not despair but the truth of life in the modern city.

Corporate Leviathan

The image of power in the modern world is no longer the crowned sovereign of Hobbes's Leviathan, a giant figure composed of countless subjects forming a single immense body. Today, that image has been replaced by the corporation, whose very name—derived from *corpus*—already signifies a body made up of countless smaller bodies: workers, managers, consumers, investors and shareholders. Corporation(n.) from 15c. means, 'persons united in a body for some purpose', from Late Latin *corporatio* 'assumption of a body' (used of the incarnation of Christ), and Latin *corporare* 'embody, make or fashion into a body'. Like the Leviathan, the corporation presents itself as a single entity, towering above individuals and institutions alike. Yet when its actions are exposed as destructive, the blame rarely attaches to

this collective body. Instead, responsibility is displaced onto a temporary figurehead, most often the chief executive officer. Once the CEO is removed or disgraced, the larger organism is declared cleansed of guilt. The shareholders remain untouched, the investors untroubled, and the corporation itself continues as if nothing has happened. This dispersal of responsibility is sustained through elaborate acts of whitewashing.

Corporations present themselves as charitable benefactors, funding ecological projects, diversity initiatives, humanitarian campaigns and programmes of social justice. These gestures function like modern indulgences, designed to cover over the crimes committed in pursuit of profit. A company that destroys forests will donate to wildlife sanctuaries, a corporation that exploits labour abroad will sponsor equality campaigns at home, and the very entities accused of poisoning the earth or destabilising societies will loudly proclaim themselves guardians of progress. In this way the corporation, like the state before it, turns guilt into spectacle, individualises responsibility, and carries on unharmed. The pattern is strikingly similar to that of state crimes in the age of dictators. When atrocities are committed by an army, the dictator alone is held responsible, as though thousands of obedient officials and soldiers played no part. The evil is condensed into one figure who is eventually punished or removed, while the structure that enabled his power survives. Today's corporations mirror this model with uncanny precision. The CEO becomes the villainous dictator, while the larger machine is declared innocent, even virtuous, once the scapegoat is sacrificed. What emerges is a new form of realism—capitalist realism—where ideology in the classical sense is no longer necessary. Fascism required propaganda, Stalinism demanded indoctrination, but capitalism thrives without such apparatus. It requires no slogans, no collective belief, only participation in the endless pursuit of profit. Profit itself has become the new faith, the unquestionable principle around which the modern world is organised. In this sense, the 'evil corporation' has become a cultural archetype. Hollywood films repeatedly present corporations as the villains—greedy, ruthless, destructive—yet this critique never undermines capitalism. On the contrary, it reinforces it. By dramatising the corporation as an evil entity, popular culture allows people to express discontent without altering their behaviour. The act of watching the film becomes a performance of resistance that requires no real resistance at all. The very system accused of devastation emerges unshaken, while the audience leaves satisfied that it has confronted the truth. Corporations themselves exploit this logic by turning protest into spectacle. Sponsoring concerts, festivals or global events, they transform critique into another brand strategy.

The global concerts of the past decades, styled as protests against poverty or injustice, relied heavily on corporate sponsorship and celebrity activism. They made demands everyone could agree on—who does not want to end poverty?—but in doing so revealed that no real political challenge was being posed. The protests became carnivals of consent, spaces where anti-capitalism was staged as another form of entertainment. Meanwhile the system remained untouchable. The deeper reality is that the corporation is not an accident within capitalism but its defining form. It is the modern Leviathan, an abstract parasite feeding on living flesh, a body that expands endlessly by consuming labour, resources and desire. Shareholders, investors and consumers are its cells, sustaining its growth while also being consumed. Unlike Hobbes's Leviathan, however, this body has no face. Its sovereignty is faceless, its voice dispersed among lawyers, managers, marketing executives and lobbyists. To fight it is to confront an abstraction that survives every scandal, every bankruptcy, every protest. The corporation is never guilty;

only its temporary leaders fall. What remains is the enduring faith in profit, a system that absolves itself through charity, protects itself through spectacle, and legitimises itself through its own apparent inevitability. This is the new reality: a Leviathan of capital in which everyone is both subject and servant, a monster made not of kings and armies but of contracts, dividends and shareholders. Its crimes are endless, yet its innocence is preserved by gestures of virtue. Its power is sustained not by ideology but by the simple conviction that there is no alternative, that profit is the only truth left.

'The role of capitalist ideology is not to make an explicit case

for something in the way that propaganda does,

but to conceal the fact that the operations of capital

do not depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief.

It is impossible to conceive of fascism or Stalinism without propaganda -

but capitalism can proceed perfectly well, in some ways better,

without anyone making a case for it.'

Mark Fisher, 'What if you held a protest and everyone came?'

Labyrinth of Social Critique

Mark Fisher's 'Capitalist Realism' (2009) is a cultural and political analysis arguing that capitalism presents itself as the only possible reality, absorbing critique and resistance into its own structures while foreclosing the imagination of alternatives. The role of capitalist ideology is not to make a case for itself in the manner of propaganda but to conceal that it does not require belief at all. Unlike fascism or Stalinism, which demanded constant persuasion and visible loyalty, capitalism thrives without conviction, often functioning more effectively when people hold it in contempt. The individual who sees himself as a rebel against the system, fighting for a better future, is already ensnared in the labyrinth of its language. Cynicism, rather than faith, becomes the prevailing attitude. People no longer claim to believe in ideological truths, yet they continue to act as though these truths governed their lives. Capitalist ideology functions not by imposing illusions upon knowledge but by embedding fantasies into the unconscious fabric of social reality. Even when one distances oneself with irony or refuses to take ideology seriously, participation persists. To laugh at the system while still working, consuming and investing is to remain caught in its logic. The illusion is not one of knowledge but of behaviour, and in this way the rebel becomes another actor in the system he resists.

At the heart of this mechanism lies the overvaluation of belief as an inner attitude at the expense of belief as behaviour. It is enough to believe privately that capitalism is wrong to feel justified in continuing to live within it. Money is dismissed as a meaningless token, yet treated in practice as sacred. This double gesture—disavowal in thought, fetishisation in action—constitutes the structure on which capitalism rests. The would-be rebel is no exception. He attends protests,

speaks the language of critique, writes denunciations of inequality, yet returns home to pay bills, buy products, and deposit wages into banks. The labyrinth closes around him: his rebellion is permitted, even encouraged, because it confirms the system's resilience. Movements that style themselves anti-capitalist often reinforce this trap. Even before their momentum was fractured by global crises, such movements seemed unable to articulate a coherent alternative to capitalism. Their protests appeared less like the foundation of political organisation than like carnivals of indignation, a series of demands made with little expectation they would be met. Such gestures merge with corporate spectacles, sharing stages with charity concerts and celebrity campaigns. The language of justice and equality is absorbed by the very structures it seeks to confront, commodified and resold as a product of virtue. Buy the right clothes, attend the right march, sign the right petition: these gestures allow individuals to experience themselves as rebels while their actions remain safe within the circuits of profit. The fantasy emerges that Western consumerism, far from being implicated in systemic inequality, might actually solve it. All one must do is purchase more wisely.

Capitalist realism, as a term, long predates its contemporary meaning, but in its most expansive sense it now describes not only art or advertising but an atmosphere. It pervades education, work, politics and culture, shaping the horizon of what is imaginable. It appears as an invisible barrier that limits thought and constrains action. The rebel who believes himself outside this order discovers instead that his very language of critique has been anticipated, absorbed and made part of the structure itself. The labyrinth has no exit, only pathways that circle back to the same centre: the inevitability of capital. What then counts as resistance? A moral critique that highlights poverty, famine or war does not suffice, because these sufferings are easily reframed as inevitable, the natural cost of progress. To hope for their elimination is dismissed as naive utopianism. Capitalist realism can only be undermined if it is shown to be inconsistent with its own claims to realism, if its inevitability can be revealed as a false construction. What appears as the natural order must be unmasked as historical contingency. Yet here too the rebel is lost in the labyrinth, because language itself has been captured. Even the terms of critique are refracted through the very structures they seek to challenge. In recent decades neoliberalism has installed what might be called a business ontology, where it is taken for granted that every part of society, from healthcare to education, should be run as a business. This appears not as a value or ideology but as fact, naturalised and unquestionable.

The true triumph of capitalist realism is that rebellion itself is already anticipated within its framework, converted into commodity or spectacle before it can gain force. The would-be revolutionary who imagines himself defying the system often discovers that he has become its ornament, another figure wandering the labyrinth of critique. His words, far from striking blows against capital, echo through corridors designed to contain them. To break free requires more than denouncing injustice or staging symbolic protests. It demands exposing contingency where necessity is claimed, making the impossible appear possible, and forcing open spaces of thought and action that capitalist realism insists cannot exist. Until then, the rebel remains what the system most desires: an individual who believes himself outside while walking endlessly within, another soul lost in the labyrinth of language that sustains the order he set out to resist.

Slow Cancellation of Future?

Mark Fisher, in his book *'Ghosts of My Life'*, describes the cultural condition of the twenty-first century as a 'slow cancellation of the future', a haunting phrase that captures the sense of exhaustion in music and art, where innovation seems to have ceased and culture has turned into endless repetition. What was once vibrant and original—drawn from the raw energy of folklore, dialects, and crystallised traditions rooted in natural rhythms—has been recycled so many times that it now sounds like background noise, an “elevator music” of civilisation. The folk ballad, the blues lament, the reggae chant or the mountain fiddle once emerged from small communities where language, music, and myth resonated with natural laws, giving people meaning, identity, and a sense of connection to cycles of life and death. But these forms, like living dialects, could only thrive for a period. Eventually they became exhausted, replaced or transformed. In the West, rock and pop music grew precisely from the appropriation of such traditions—blues, country, bluegrass, reggae—and distilled their intensity into a language of mass culture. Yet once incorporated into the machinery of recording, promotion, and endless broadcasting, their originality eroded.

Each crystallised tradition was first borrowed, then imitated, then looped and remixed, until it hollowed out into stylised echoes. This exhaustion is not accidental but symptomatic of what Fisher calls a temporal malaise. In earlier times, music was tied to specific periods and carried the charge of historical difference. Folk songs in dialects carried the struggles of peasants, the joys of festivals, the laments of hunger and exile. Later, modern pop and rock movements of the twentieth century created distinct epochs—the sounds of the 1950s, 60s, 70s, and 80s were unmistakably their own. Genres rose and fell in rapid succession, mirroring the restless impermanence of modernity. To hear a song was to feel the moment of its birth, its cultural energy inseparable from its time. But today that specificity has collapsed. Songs produced in 2025 could be played in 1995 and hardly seem out of place. What once felt radically new has become unimaginable. Instead of futurity, we inhabit a flat loop of endless retro, where the past is recycled without end and nothing marks the present as unique. Matthew Arnold, in his *'Culture and Anarchy'*, distinguished between an “epoch of expansion”—when creativity, energy, and synthesis of ideas flourish—and an “epoch of concentration,” where culture loses vitality, builds barriers against the new, and merely repeats itself. He saw Periclean Athens and Elizabethan England as expansions, and his own Victorian era as a time of concentration, a blockage in which intellectual clarity was needed to prepare for future creation. Fisher’s diagnosis echoes Arnold’s: the second half of the twentieth century was an epoch of expansion, when music and art raced forward, fuelled by social democracy, cultural cross-pollination, and rapid technological change. From the explosion of rock and roll, through punk and hip-hop, to rave and jungle, each decade seemed to invent a new sound. But since the early 2000s we have entered an epoch of concentration, in which the innovations of the past century are endlessly recycled but nothing genuinely new appears.

Kurt Cobain’s voice of disillusionment was already a symptom of this blockage, a sense that all future possibilities had been cancelled even before his death. Cobain knew he was only another spectacle, 'that nothing runs better on MTV than a protest against MTV', and that even recognising this was already a cliché. The comparison with folklore is telling. Traditional songs and dialects emerged organically from the rhythms of communal life. They were bound to seasons, rituals, and the cycles of history. Their energy came from authenticity, but precisely because they were tied to real life, they could not endure forever. Once uprooted from their contexts and absorbed into the circuits of mass culture, they lost their original force. Blues,

country, reggae—each carried distilled expressions of survival, faith, resistance, or joy. When pop and rock absorbed them, they sparked a new epoch of expansion, infusing mass culture with energy drawn from folk traditions. But once those energies were mined and commodified, only repetition remained. Today pop culture endlessly loops fragments of these older forms until they sound empty, drained of life, as if the civilisation itself had become obsolete. This exhaustion reflects not only musical stagnation but the larger cultural entropy of the West. The repetition of forms without novelty signals a civilisation that has lost its sense of futurity. Once, technology promised new sensations; the wah-wah pedal, the sampler, the synthesiser created sounds that could not have existed before. Now technological change lies mostly in distribution and consumption—streaming platforms, algorithms, high-definition remasters. The sound itself remains trapped in retro, endlessly refurbishing the familiar. Culture mirrors the condition of politics and society, where the promise of transformation has been replaced by management of decline. Just as democracies struggle under crises of governability, so culture survives only by recycling past energies. Arnold argued that epochs of expansion and concentration alternate, that both are essential to the growth of human culture.

Perhaps the present stagnation is not permanent but a prelude to another burst of creativity. Yet Fisher's bleak insight is that the slow cancellation of the future may be more than a passing phase. In music, in politics, in daily life, the sense of forward momentum has evaporated. Time itself feels frozen, clotted, unable to produce radical novelty. Retro is no longer an exception but the very condition of culture. The slow cancellation of the future reveals itself most clearly in the banal ubiquity of pop music that no longer belongs to any moment. It has become the elevator music of civilisation: endlessly recycled, endlessly available, endlessly boring. Behind it lies the tragedy that the authentic energies of folklore, dialect, and communal tradition—once mysterious carriers of natural law—have been exhausted, leaving behind only hollow loops. The collapse of originality in sound mirrors the entropy of language and culture as a whole. What was once expansion has become concentration, what was once future has become repetition. If the folk songs of villages carried echoes of eternity, today's pop culture carries only the echo of its own exhaustion, a civilisation speaking in loops, unable to imagine its own tomorrow.

*'Cobain knew he was just another piece of spectacle,
that nothing runs better on MTV than a protest against MTV;
knew that his every move was a cliché scripted in advance,
knew that even realising it is a cliché'.
-Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*

Far From the Madding Crowd

Modern life often produces a peculiar suffocation that is not caused by other people themselves but by the words they carry and endlessly repeat. What weighs on the individual is not merely the presence of others but the slogans, clichés, and automatic responses that dominate social exchange. Daily conversation becomes a performance of ideology: questions are asked without listening, opinions are repeated without reflection, and speech acts circulate

as if scripted. The self, confronted with this barrage, begins to feel burdened not by the physical nearness of others but by the language they embody, a language that imprisons as much as it communicates. The modern world equates constant social activity with health and meaning, yet many discover that beneath the surface of community lies a monotony of recycled words that drains rather than nourishes.

What appears to be withdrawal from gatherings, family obligations, or public events is often a retreat from the oppressive weight of official language, which no longer offers genuine connection but only reiterates slogans of politics, advertising, or media. In this sense the crowd itself is not dangerous, but the words that move through it, shaping thought and dictating feeling, impose an invisible burden. Just as birds move in flocks or animals in herds, people move together through shared language, bound by expressions that seem natural but are in fact governed by social forces as entropic as any law of nature. The slogans of fear, the clichés of success, the automatic assurances of security—all these form the atmosphere of speech within which the self is encircled. Living within such a field means internalising anxiety and guilt not as private emotions but as linguistic conditions, since to speak the official idioms is already to inhabit the fear and obligation they contain. Roderick once noted that television, news, and political rhetoric normalise dread through repetition, but the same process operates at the level of everyday conversation. A neighbour's small talk, a colleague's questions, or a relative's advice may appear harmless, yet they echo the broader discourses of fear and conformity. Over decades, the self catalogues thousands of such exchanges and comes to recognise their draining quality. The polite question becomes an interrogation, the repeated slogan becomes a command, the offered reassurance becomes a reminder of danger. Words colonise inner life until the individual begins to feel constantly watched, judged, or demanded upon, even in the absence of others. It is in this condition that solitude appears not as loneliness but as relief. Silence becomes the one refuge from the endless noise of social language.

Religious traditions have long recognised this truth: monks retreat into quietude not because they despise others but because they seek liberation from the weight of words. Silence itself carries meaning; as has often been remarked, the word listen contains the same letters as silent. To be silent is not to negate speech but to create space where hearing is possible again, where the self can recover from the siege of slogans. In silence one discovers that much of what passed for communication was merely repetition, and that authentic thought emerges only when the mind is no longer compelled to respond automatically. Modern individuals who withdraw selectively from social life are often accused of depression, selfishness, or misanthropy, yet such judgments miss the deeper reality. Their retreat is a form of energetic and linguistic intelligence, a recognition that constant exposure to the words of ideology corrodes identity. They are not rejecting people but the language that people unthinkingly reproduce. Family gatherings that feel like performances, conversations that circle endlessly around clichés, friendships maintained by habit rather than authenticity—all reveal how language imprisons both speaker and listener. Withdrawal, then, becomes not an act of bitterness but of discernment, a preservation of energy and meaning in a world saturated with linguistic noise. Solitude, when chosen, allows reconnection with dormant aspects of the self. Freed from constant response to the demands of language, individuals rediscover creativity, curiosity, and peace. The quiet mind finds space for reflection that the crowded mind, cluttered with slogans, cannot. Time in nature, time in writing, time in simple silence reveals that meaning does not

require constant affirmation from others but emerges from the capacity to listen without interruption.

In this sense, silence becomes both rebellion and salvation: rebellion against the tyranny of official speech, salvation through the recovery of authentic presence. Yet this silence is fragile, always threatened by the return of the crowd and its words. The entropic force of society, like the natural law binding a flock, presses individuals back into conformity. The challenge is whether one can maintain spaces of silence within a culture that equates speech with worth and noise with vitality. To step away from the madding crowd is to resist not humanity but its language, to create distance from the slogans that imprison thought. Far from being antisocial, it is a gesture of care for the self and ultimately for others, since only in silence can one rediscover the capacity to listen. In the end, the burden the self carries is not other people but the words they repeat, the ideologies they embody without reflection, and the expectations they impose through language. Escape is found not in exile from humanity but in moments of silence where the siege of words lifts. To listen, one must first be silent, and in that silence the self may find the space to breathe far from the madding crowd. Is society the greatest danger for man?

'Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife

Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;

Along the cool sequester'd vale of life

They kept the noiseless tenor of their way'.

- Thomas Gray, *'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'* (1751)

4. Self Under Siege

The "Deflationary Spiral"

In his 1993 lecture course 'The Self Under Siege', part of the series 'Philosophy and Human Values', Rick Roderick described how modern identity is placed under invisible burdens created not by external invaders but by society, civilisation, and language itself. He argued that philosophy had become 'deflationary', reduced to linguistic puzzles and technicalities, at precisely the moment when the human self was most pressured by economic, political, and technological forces. The result was a vacuum where once grand questions of truth and meaning had been addressed, and into this vacuum rushed languages of fear. Ideology, science, art, and the rhetoric of political power saturated daily life with discourses of threat and catastrophe. Language ceased to serve as a transparent medium of truth and became instead the very weapon that besieged the self. The twentieth century produced an environment of information abundance but meaning scarcity. Religion, once a reservoir of cultural orientation, collapsed, leaving individuals surrounded by fragments—statistics, headlines, media images—that overwhelmed without guiding.

People longed for narratives to bind their lives together, but the available narratives were filled with warnings of annihilation. Political leaders, corporations, and cultural institutions filled the

void with constant reminders of nuclear war, terrorism, economic collapse, or ecological disaster. Language thus constructed an atmosphere where fear was not an accident but a permanent climate of existence. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur described Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche as the “masters of suspicion” for unmasking religion, morality, and belief as disguises for power, repression, or interest. Their critiques liberated thought from illusion but also left individuals vulnerable, as once-stable meanings dissolved into suspicion. In the absence of faith, the imagination became colonised by modern discourses of fear: technocratic jargon, political rhetoric, scientific rationality, and media spectacle. Language not only described reality but shaped how it was lived. During the Cold War, words such as mushroom cloud, deterrence, and mutually assured destruction normalised the fear of extinction. Later, the figure of the terrorist became the embodiment of evil, condensed into symbols like axis of evil or weapons of mass destruction. Repeated endlessly, these words produced not panic but habituation. Citizens carried fear as part of their identity, as ordinary as breathing. Scientific and artistic discourses also reinforced this climate. Science, while promising control, frequently depicted humanity as fragile in the face of nuclear chain reactions, pandemics, or ecological collapse. Art mirrored these fears through dystopian novels and apocalyptic cinema. Even scepticism could not escape, for individuals doubting official accounts still lived within the same vocabulary of terror. A person might reject the likelihood of nuclear war, yet their imagination remained haunted by images and words of destruction. What developed was a culture of fear that sustained itself. Leaders exploited it to maintain power, corporations commodified it through media spectacles, and individuals internalised it until it defined their very sense of self.

Every new crisis—terrorist attacks, recessions, pandemics—was framed in the grammar of catastrophe, reinforcing the sense of danger as permanent. Over time, repetition eroded extraordinary impact and produced banality, yet this very banality ensured that fear became inescapable. Political exaggerations could be mocked, yet people continued to live within worlds defined by them. The effect on the self was profound. When all public narratives emphasise danger and destruction, individuals struggle to form personal stories of affirmation. They end up adopting the vocabulary of fear into their private lives, describing family, work, or health anxieties in the language of crisis or threat. This internal colonisation of imagination by the rhetoric of fear is what it means for the self to be under siege. Suspicion deepens the crisis. After Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, every belief could be dismissed as false consciousness, projection, or will to power. Once language itself becomes entropic, words like evil or terror lose precision, signifying everything and nothing, yet still structuring perception so that the world is seen as an endless field of threats. The search for meaning is caught in paradox: individuals desire narratives that affirm their humanity, but the only available ones are saturated with catastrophe. Material comforts provide no relief, as despair arises from the inability to make sense of the self. The rise of therapy, self-help, and recovery movements reflects an attempt to patch together identities fragmented by information overload and consumed by discourses of fear.

These are not personal flaws but structural conditions of modern civilisation. Philosophy itself seems disarmed, offering deflationary statements that provide no guidance. Yet its role remains crucial in naming the condition. To describe how language, ideology, and power routinise catastrophe is to reveal the invisible atmosphere in which modern selves live. Fear has been

manufactured, normalised, and banalised, and the self is forced to carry it as an invisible burden. Civilisation and its languages of fear thus besiege the individual from within, creating a cycle that mirrors the entropy of civilisation itself. In this cycle, the self becomes both product and victim of a system where communication is saturated with catastrophe. The self under siege is trapped in a deflationary spiral where the collapse of meaning feeds the language of fear, and the language of fear in turn deepens the collapse of meaning.

How Words Besieged the Self?

How words besieged the Self In his 1993 lecture 'Derrida and the Ends of Man' Rick Roderick examined how Jacques Derrida's deconstruction exposed the instability of language, but he also suggested a darker truth: that words themselves, shaped by ideology, science, art, and political power, have become the very weapons that besiege the human self. Language is not a transparent medium describing reality but the primary tool that constructs it, and in modernity it constructs above all a world saturated with threats, dangers, and apocalyptic visions. From bureaucratic documents to media spectacles, official language has become inseparable from the creation of fear. Politicians summon enemies—terrorists, criminals, foreigners—through words that portray permanent menace to social order. Scientists deploy vocabularies of risk and probability that turn catastrophe into a statistical inevitability, rehearsing nuclear destruction or climate collapse in technical jargon. Religious institutions conjure the demonic through words of sin, hell, and punishment, embedding dread in the fabric of everyday life. Even art, which might resist, often reproduces catastrophe, aestheticising disaster until it feels ordinary. Language in all these cases is never neutral but functions as an engine of anxiety.

Derrida revealed that stability of meaning is illusory because words never stand directly for things but for other words in endless play. Meaning is deferred, never final. This instability—différance—creates the opening where power operates. If words cannot be anchored in reality, authority can fill the gap with images of evil and tales of menace, and it is through this gap that ideology colonises thought. During the Cold War the word communism did not merely name a political system but evoked atheism, tyranny, nuclear threat, and moral decay. A single word generated dread, legitimising surveillance, censorship, and war. In the early twenty-first century the word terrorism performs a similar function, elastic enough to cover dissidents, guerrilla fighters, or loosely defined radicalism. These words do not describe but incant, transforming vague anxieties into permanent atmospheres of fear. The self lives in such a climate not because of a singular threat but because language normalises fear until it becomes background noise. Repetition ensures that apocalypse is no longer extraordinary but permanent possibility. Nuclear war, economic collapse, viral pandemics, and environmental catastrophe are invoked daily, not as exceptions but as the weather of existence. Fear becomes banal, and language ensures we learn to live with it. Art and literature amplify this condition. Modernist and postmodernist works dwell on wastelands, trials, and dystopias, while films replay nuclear meltdowns, alien invasions, and viral plagues. Such spectacles aestheticise apocalypse, habituating the imagination to destruction until fear feels entertaining. Science adds another layer by translating uncertainty into probability. Forecasts of collapse appear in charts, statistics, and risk models, lending inevitability to disaster. Insurance, medical warnings, and

environmental reports speak in the language of probability, which ensures that harm is always anticipated and safety always temporary. Thus science, though grounded in reason, contributes to the same culture of dread.

Ideology guarantees that this language of fear serves power. Fear justifies militarism, censorship, policing, and consumption of security. Citizens immersed in vocabularies of “evil empires” or “axes of terror” internalise obedience, learning to see the world as dangerous and themselves as fragile. The self is besieged not by armies but by words that organise imagination around danger. Derrida’s exposure of linguistic instability reveals why this is effective. Because words never coincide with things, they can always be manipulated. Communism or terrorism can mean whatever power requires, while even democracy or freedom can be weaponised by presenting their absence as catastrophe. For Derrida this shows the impossibility of final truth, but for ideology it offers infinite opportunities to control. This is why deconstruction provoked hostility in American academia: it exposed the fragility of meanings upon which fear-based authority depends. Roderick argued that the self is not simply overwhelmed by too much information but imprisoned by fear overload. Words bombard us until dread becomes the grammar of daily life. We live with annihilation as casually as we live with weather forecasts, carrying fear as part of identity. The self thus inhabits a paradox. On one side, scepticism erodes meaning, for if every word is unstable then certainty dissolves. On the other side, fear persists because repeated words shape imagination, regardless of whether their threats are believed. The self is torn between disbelief in official narratives and immersion in their emotional grip. Siege is the proper metaphor. Siege is not sudden attack but prolonged encirclement, the erosion of autonomy through constant pressure.

The self is surrounded not by weapons but by words—official statements, scientific predictions, artistic images, political slogans—until resistance weakens. Fear is normalised, and to live under perpetual threat becomes to live normally. The conclusion is that there is no simple escape. Religion, science, and philosophy are themselves implicated in the language of fear. Closure is impossible, as Derrida warned, for words will always slip. What remains is the recognition of the condition: the self is besieged by language itself, by words that construct catastrophe until destruction feels natural. Language is not sacred but the very fabric of society, the bond that unites people into a flock moving under natural laws. Like all collective systems, it follows the entropic tendency toward disorder, even while pretending to secure stability. The deepest irony is that language itself was created to conceal this truth, serving as both metaphor and mask for the entropy it cannot escape.

Normalisation of Threat

In his 1990 lecture ‘Philosophy and Postmodern Culture’ Rick Roderick examined the fate of human values under modern mass communication and postmodern conditions, concluding that language itself had been transformed into a weapon of fear. No longer merely descriptive, the words of politics, science, art, and ideology became the mechanisms through which anxiety, guilt, and dread were constructed and normalised. People were not only surrounded by dangers but taught to think and speak through vocabularies that made destruction permanent, so that living itself became life under siege. The self, Roderick argued, was not simply challenged by

external crises but imprisoned by the very words that described them. Philosophy had once concerned itself with rational accounts of human values, from Hegel's view that they arose within historical structures to Freud's exploration of hidden desires. Yet in postmodern culture, the forces that had once been unconscious or structural migrated into everyday language. Television, advertising, media, and politics turned words into instruments of fear. Repeated endlessly, they created a background noise of dread that individuals internalised as natural. Phrases such as "rogue state," "evil empire," "axis of evil," or "terror threat" circulated without proof, yet demanded obedience and reshaped perception.

Official news presented itself as neutral, but its words carried authority: wars were "won," threats "contained," and populations "protected." Euphemisms disguised violence, while the constant invocation of menace made fear a permanent expectation. Speaking this language meant accepting siege as a normal condition of life. Culture amplified the process. Roderick, drawing on Debord and Baudrillard, noted how the spectacle detached experience into consumable images. Films and television dramas rehearsed catastrophe until disaster became familiar. Apocalyptic cinema and advertising turned destruction into entertainment, aestheticising fear until it felt ordinary. Hyperreality meant that an image of nuclear explosion or alien invasion could terrify more powerfully than actual events. Audiences were trained to inhabit dread, not as exception but as ordinary spectacle. Science clothed the same fear in rational vocabulary. Probabilities, risk assessments, and forecasts of catastrophe translated uncertainty into inevitability. Phrases like "climate crisis," "super-virus," or "nuclear winter" were not merely scientific categories but ideological warnings. They created an expectation that disaster was calculable, measurable, and therefore always imminent. Roderick's insight that culture could reverse enlightenment applied here: instead of clarifying the world, science overwhelmed individuals with visions of collapse. To live rationally meant to live expecting catastrophe. The result was a culture where fear of evil was permanent. Language did not point to occasional threats but constructed a world where danger was constant. Roderick turned to Freud's account of civilisation as a struggle between eros, the force of love, and thanatos, the drive of death. In contemporary culture, thanatos seemed to have triumphed, not only materially but linguistically.

Words of death, destruction, and menace saturated the symbolic order, while words of love and creation lost authority. Fear was repeated until it became banal, training citizens to accept annihilation as they accepted weather reports. Sirens, alerts, warning systems, and news tickers formed a constant rhythm of dread. What mattered was not truth but repetition: the assurance that danger was real and fear necessary. This repetition corroded the self. Freud compared consciousness to a small garrison surrounded by the unconscious. Roderick suggested that mass culture inverted this, pushing the conscious garrison back into unconsciousness. Words flooded the mind until private experience was shaped by public threats. The individual lost autonomy, becoming a fragment within the discourse of fear. Despair, he argued, was not only existential but structural: the fate of a garrison surrounded by a language it could not escape. Everyday life provided examples. Children learned morality through video games framed by battles and destruction. Citizens tuned in to the news less for facts than for reassurance that threats persisted. Even leisure was colonised by simulation, as in *Total Recall*, where revolutionary fantasies were manufactured as consumer products. Resistance too risked absorption: anti-war protests and cultural rebellions became spectacles that reinforced the very system they opposed.

Roderick warned that democracy itself was threatened when unanimity prevailed, when dissent was framed as unpatriotic. Yet official language pushed towards such unanimity, silencing opposition through its vocabulary of danger. To resist required irony, simulation, or strategies of reversal, but these remained precarious. The deeper problem was that language itself had been captured, enclosing individuals in a discourse of fear that allowed no escape. Roderick's conclusion was bleak yet clear. Philosophy could not offer comfort or certainty but could name the devastation. If words had been turned into weapons of dread, then the task was to recognise this colonisation of thought.

Only by acknowledging that fear had been normalised, that language had become the very siege, could space for resistance be imagined. The hope lay in creating new metaphors, new stories, and new ways of speaking that might open possibilities beyond catastrophe. Until then, people lived in a culture where evil was always present, not because it dominated reality but because official language ensured that it did. To speak and think in that language was to live permanently in anxiety, guilt, and fear, waiting—and perhaps even longing—for the apocalypse that words themselves had promised. The longing for apocalypse or revelation, even at the cost of destruction, is ironically mirrored in doomscrolling, where people compulsively seek until they encounter a catastrophe terrible enough to momentarily satisfy their hunger for shock. The craving for apocalypse or revelation, even when it comes with destruction, is ironically mirrored on the Internet in 'doomscrolling', where people compulsively search until they find a catastrophe dreadful enough to momentarily sate their appetite for shock.

'Fatal Strategies'

Rick Roderick's lecture "Fatal Strategies" drew on Jean Baudrillard's vision of postmodernity but also revealed a deeper truth: that language itself, controlled by ideology, science, art, and political power, weaves fear into the very fabric of daily life. Words no longer simply describe but summon spectres of menace—evil, destruction, the enemy—that hover everywhere, never visible yet never gone. Living in such a climate, individuals find themselves under siege, surrounded not by bombs or armies but by words that normalise catastrophe as the condition of existence. Baudrillard, following Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, described a world where simulation is indistinguishable from reality. Television, advertising, and digital media do not reflect reality but create it. The battlefield dissolves into the broadcast; what matters is not what happens but how it is presented. During the Gulf War, missiles replayed endlessly on television were more real than soldiers' lived experience. In this sense reality itself became a linguistic construction, produced through headlines, slogans, and soundbites that circulated globally. The phrase "axis of evil" or "weapons of mass destruction" did not identify something tangible but conjured a cloud of dread powerful enough to dictate foreign policy. Art and media reinforced this climate.

Films, novels, and advertisements rehearsed apocalypse until it became banal. Images of enemies, terrorists, criminals, and disasters circulated endlessly, aestheticising dread into entertainment. A fictional explosion terrified more effectively than footage of real war. Children raised on video games and cinematic catastrophe learned fear as naturally as previous generations learned prayer. Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality captured this paradox:

simulated fear became more immediate than real danger, and the self ceased to distinguish between them. Science, too, became complicit. Vast data sets and complex calculations were condensed into potent symbols: “climate crisis,” “super-virus,” “nuclear winter.” These words condensed uncertainty into inevitability, haunting collective imagination whether or not disaster materialised. Scientific language merged with political discourse, teaching populations that catastrophe was always imminent, calculable, and thus inescapable. Instead of enlightenment, such language overwhelmed, demanding submission to experts who named the threats. Ideology thrived in this culture of fear. Each invocation of evil justified greater obedience. Citizens were told that survival depended on trusting those who named the menace, while dissent was stigmatised as betrayal. “Evil” itself became less an ethical concept than a linguistic instrument. Once invoked, it needed no evidence. It created a permanent atmosphere of insecurity, ensuring vigilance as a way of life. Fear was not an interruption of ordinary existence but its permanent condition. The more threats were named, the more ordinary they became. Nuclear annihilation, terrorism, environmental collapse—each entered daily vocabulary until apocalypse became background noise, like traffic or advertising. Catastrophe ceased to be extraordinary; it became expected. People learned not to resist fear but to inhabit it, defining themselves by the dangers their culture constantly rehearsed. Under such conditions the self is not simply attacked but constituted by siege. Language penetrates identity, shaping imagination, memory, and desire. Private life is saturated with public threats. Even leisure and fantasy are colonised by the vocabulary of menace, from horror films to news tickers. The self becomes fractured, permanently anticipating catastrophe, resigned to live within a discourse that repeats doom endlessly.

For Baudrillard, fatal strategies were ironic ways of responding to this condition: playing along with the spectacle, embracing uncertainty, resisting the illusion of stability. Yet the darker implication is that such strategies are futile if the siege of language is itself natural, as inevitable as entropy. If fear is hardwired into the grammar of civilisation, then attempts to escape only reproduce the same logic. The self’s rebellion risks turning suicidal, seeking not liberation but annihilation. For some, the ultimate fatal strategy becomes the fantasy of ending the world itself. Roderick noted chillingly that “most folks want to nuke somebody again and why not,” a line that captured the dangerous seduction of absolute destruction. After decades of smaller threats—terrorists, viruses, immigrants, poverty, climate collapse—the nuclear vocabulary still stands apart as the last symbolic weapon, capable of collapsing all disputes into the vision of apocalypse. To invoke it is to summon not just an enemy but the end of history itself. Thus the self, besieged by the constant language of evil, may come to desire the very apocalypse that language promises, a catastrophic conclusion that mirrors the compulsions of doomscrolling: searching until one finds an image terrible enough to halt the endless repetition of fear. Fatal strategies, then, are not merely ironic games within the spectacle but gestures that reveal the entropic path of civilisation itself. In a world where fear has been normalised into daily speech, where every word rehearses destruction, the self’s attempts at freedom are bound by the very laws of the system it resists. Whether through irony, simulation, or even nuclear annihilation, the outcome is the same: the siege remains, and language ensures that fear survives. The paradox is cruel: the more language names evil, the more evil becomes tempting; the more fear is invoked, the more fear becomes accepted. After even climate catastrophe has been

linguistically normalised, the nuclear threat still stands apart as the last vocabulary of absolute destruction.

Hypernormal Catastrophe

Adam Curtis, in his 2016 documentary 'HyperNormalisation', traces how governments, financiers, and ideological powerbrokers abandoned the complexity of reality and instead created simplified narratives that framed the world in terms of good and evil. In these narratives, terrorism, nuclear annihilation, chemical weapons, and extremism were not occasional crises but permanent features of existence. Such spectres were conjured not by events alone but by the language through which events were named and circulated. Words became weapons, shaping how citizens understood themselves, their enemies, and their future. Through the repeated invocation of horror, destruction, and evil, a grammar of fear was established, woven into public consciousness until it became the ordinary atmosphere of daily life. Catastrophe ceased to be extraordinary; it became the fabric of existence. The Cold War provides the clearest early example. Nuclear weapons were not simply military technologies but linguistic symbols of ultimate doom. Political speeches endlessly repeated words such as annihilation, fallout, and mass destruction, embedding them into collective imagination. At the same time, the technocratic vocabulary of balance of power and delicate equilibrium promised safety while only underscoring the fragility of survival.

Citizens lived under the shadow of mushroom clouds while being told that deterrence was their only protection. Language both terrorised and pacified, creating a paradoxical condition in which fear was ever-present yet routinised. As global conflicts shifted, the central figure of fear changed. The communist enemy faded, replaced by the terrorist. Suicide bombings, hostage crises, and televised violence introduced a new lexicon: beheadings, martyrdom, chemical weapons, extremist ideologies. Politicians and news media repeated these words until they no longer described singular events but an ever-present possibility. The effect was to construct an atmosphere where invisible dangers were felt to be everywhere, regardless of their actual occurrence. Citizens inhabited a linguistic world in which menace was the norm, and daily life was filtered through the vocabulary of threat. Curtis argues that this simplification of complex realities into binary categories of good and evil allowed leaders to retain power when traditional politics faltered. Instead of addressing structural inequalities or economic crises, politicians narrated enemies: rogue states, terror networks, and criminal ideologies. Phrases such as 'axis of evil' or 'weapons of mass destruction' condensed immense geopolitical problems into emotionally charged symbols. These words organised reality by giving citizens villains to fear and heroes to trust. Yet this came at a cost: the loss of political imagination. Real alternatives to crisis disappeared, replaced by a cycle of linguistic threat and reassurance. Mass media ensured that this vocabulary saturated everyday experience. News broadcasts, radio, newspapers, and later digital feeds repeated the same words with minor variations. Terror, bomb, attack, evil, threat—these became ordinary components of daily conversation. The cumulative effect was not constant panic but habituation. Catastrophe became background noise, as routine as weather forecasts or sports results. Images of explosions and refugee crises were placed alongside celebrity scandals, normalising devastation by its very juxtaposition with the trivial. The extraordinary became banal precisely because it was constant. Politicians understood the power of this normalisation. By invoking fear regularly, they reinforced their

authority. Even critics often echoed the same vocabulary, trapped within the framework of fear they wished to resist.

Curtis shows how artists and radicals in the 1970s and 1980s, retreating into private expression, left the dominant language of fear unchallenged. By refusing to create alternative vocabularies, they allowed the official discourse to define common sense. The result was a culture in which fear, though widely disbelieved, remained inescapable. The danger of this linguistic normalisation extends beyond politics into psychology. When individuals are bombarded with catastrophic vocabulary every day, fear becomes part of their identity. Yet because it is routinised, fear no longer produces decisive action. Instead, it produces resignation and compartmentalisation. People continue their daily lives while carrying abstract anxiety, accepting catastrophe as inevitable but distant. This paradoxical mixture of belief and disbelief is what Curtis calls hypernormalisation: a fake world of simplified threats that everyone knows is constructed, but no one can escape. Language, in this sense, is entropic. The repeated invocation of horror erodes distinctions between real danger and imagined threat. Words such as evil or terror, once meant to shock, lose their meaning through overuse yet retain their power to organise perception.

The more evil is named, the less it signifies, but the more it shapes identity. This is the paradox of the normalised catastrophe: fear becomes empty but remains omnipresent, banal yet inescapable. The final consequence is the internalisation of catastrophe as the horizon of human existence. Citizens narrate their lives through the vocabulary of apocalypse, terror, and destruction. Conversations, entertainment, and private anxieties are saturated with images of collapse. The hypernormalised catastrophe is thus the defining condition of modernity: people live not with fear of destruction but in fear as destruction, their subjectivity shaped by words that speak doom into permanence.

The Risk Society

'HyperNormalisation', shows how governments, financiers, and ideological elites abandoned the complexity of reality and constructed simplified narratives of good and evil to hold society together. By the mid-1980s, the balance of global power was increasingly determined not by armies or resources but by banks, networks, and flows of information. What began as financial experimentation in New York soon spread across the West, producing a new form of domination that was largely invisible, hidden in code, algorithms, and corporate systems. Writer William Gibson dramatised this invisible world in his novels, coining the word "cyberspace" to describe networks where financial and technological power ruled without courts or parliaments. For him, this was a dystopia of raw domination. Yet on the American West Coast, the heirs of the counterculture embraced cyberspace as a dream of liberation, much like LSD had once promised to dissolve the limits of perception.

John Perry Barlow, a former lyricist for the Grateful Dead, declared cyberspace a sanctuary of imagination and freedom, calling for governments to leave it untouched. His "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" reimagined networks as free zones of expression and creativity. But hackers quickly punctured this optimism. Figures like Phiber Optik and Acid Phreak exposed cyberspace as already colonised by financial institutions and systems of surveillance. By breaking into TRW databases, once designed for Cold War intelligence but now governing credit systems, they revealed that individuals were bound by debts, profiles, and

histories controlled by corporations. Far from being free, cyberspace was the infrastructure of a new financial sovereignty. Governments too mastered the art of constructing enemies and narratives. After setbacks in Lebanon, the Reagan administration turned Colonel Muammar Gaddafi into a convenient villain. Whether or not he was truly responsible for specific attacks, he was cast as a madman, a sponsor of terror, and a threat to civilisation. Gaddafi himself played into this image, amplifying his notoriety. The result was a feedback loop in which fiction and reality fed one another, each strengthening the other's performance. At the same time, new myths of UFOs and extraterrestrials circulated widely. Reports of alien craft were later revealed to have concealed experimental weapons tests, with figures like Paul Bennewitz deliberately misled into believing they had discovered otherworldly technology.

Government deception blurred fact and fiction, creating new mythologies that distracted from actual military developments. These examples show how politics in the 1980s was transformed into what Reagan's advisers called "perception management." This was not just propaganda but the active construction of realities designed to reduce complexity into compelling myths. Cyberspace was reframed as freedom, Gaddafi as evil incarnate, UFOs as mysteries concealing weapons—each narrative managed public perception, captivating citizens while preventing deeper questioning. In this new order, the struggle was no longer over truth but over the manufacture of believable stories. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the binary of capitalism versus communism dissolved, leaving a vacuum. Into this space rushed a new language of fear: terrorism, rogue states, weapons of mass destruction. Politicians no longer promised to build a better world but to manage risks. Their speeches increasingly resembled warnings of natural disasters: forecasts of terror, ecological collapse, financial breakdown. Fear became the common lexicon of governance. Ulrich Beck described this transformation as the rise of the 'risk society'. In such a world, progress and growth could no longer be assumed. The Club of Rome's 1968 report 'The Limits to Growth' had already warned that industrial and economic expansion faced ecological and material limits. In the 1975 'Crisis of Democracy' report, Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki argued that democracies were becoming ungovernable as citizens demanded too much from political systems. Later, Huntington himself warned of the coming 'clash of civilisations', where cultural and religious divides, not ideology, would shape conflict. Together these diagnoses pointed to the same conclusion: the West could no longer imagine infinite progress, only looming collapse. The Lockerbie bombing of 1988 illustrates how language managed this condition of permanent risk. Responsibility for the attack was shifted from Syria to Libya, not because of decisive evidence but because of diplomatic expediency.

Gaddafi became the archetype of evil, his name synonymous with poison gas, terrorism, and irrational violence. Language did not simply describe him but created him as a symbol to reassure anxious populations. Citizens were taught to equate safety with vigilance and obedience, and complexity with chaos. The West thus learned to govern not by offering hope but by managing fear. The conclusion is stark. In Curtis's analysis, the dominant narrative of Western civilisation has become its own possible collapse. Progress, once the central value, is overshadowed by the management of decline. The West presents itself as a "risk society," where catastrophe is always imminent—ecological, nuclear, terrorist, or civilisational. The language of fear sustains political authority but also erodes imagination, leaving people resigned to permanent threat. The stories of modernity now revolve around the fragility of civilisation itself, and the final irony is that this fragility has become the West's only shared belief.

The Architecture of Fear

Language does not merely name enemies; it creates categories of horror that shape perception and organise emotional life. The rise of suicide bombings in the 1990s generated a new vocabulary of martyrs and human bombs. In the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, this linguistic framing became central. When the Egyptian theologian Sheikh Qaradawi declared that suicide bombings were not suicide but martyrdom, he embedded violence within a sacred narrative. Conversely, Israeli and Western politicians described the same actions as terrorism, barbarism, and attacks on civilisation. Each side saturated its discourse with fear and legitimacy simultaneously. Truth was less important than resonance: words carried symbolic charges that influenced emotions and behaviour more powerfully than evidence. This semantic battle continues, showing how language is weaponised not only to justify violence but also to frame the very boundaries of what counts as reality. The attacks of 11 September 2001 intensified this linguistic arms race.

Almost instantly, politicians invoked words of absolute evil. Concepts such as war, annihilation, genocide, gas attacks, torture, and beheadings became not simply political rhetoric but structuring principles of public life. Television screens filled with images of burning towers, falling bodies, and collapsing cities, all narrated by the same vocabulary of catastrophe. Fear was presented not as temporary crisis but as a permanent condition. Media repetition ensured that these words became unavoidable, embedding them into daily conversation until it was impossible to imagine a world outside them. Citizens were forced to live within a semantic field where fear was constant, normalised, and inescapable. The power of this strategy lay precisely in its banality. Repetition drained words of their extraordinary force. Terms such as terror, bomb, anthrax, jihad, and torture entered ordinary conversation alongside weather forecasts, economic updates, and celebrity gossip. Citizens adapted not by rejecting fear but by incorporating it into the background of life. The possibility of annihilation was treated as though it were as ordinary as rain. This was the condition Adam Curtis described in *HyperNormalisation*: a world where people suspect the narratives of fear are exaggerated or false, yet continue to live by them because there is no alternative vocabulary. The grammar of fear becomes banal, and its very banality gives it power. The rise of digital media magnified this entropic collapse of meaning. Algorithms, search engines, and recommendation systems learned to circulate words that triggered the strongest emotional reactions, and words of terror inevitably rose to the surface. The online environment became a mirror of human anxiety, constantly feeding back the vocabulary of threat. What Joseph Weizenbaum's 1960s experiment with the chatbot Eliza once did on a small scale—reflecting a user's words back to them—was expanded to planetary proportions. Citizens saw their own fears reproduced, amplified, and returned until the language of catastrophe itself felt like truth. Today automated systems simulate empathy, conduct therapy, teach lessons, or staff call centres, replacing real human interactions with programmed responses. The loop between political rhetoric, media reproduction, and algorithmic circulation has turned fear into a self-sustaining linguistic environment. The effect on individual identity has been profound.

People increasingly narrate their private lives in the language of security and threat. Discussions about travel are framed by airport controls and terror alerts; conversations about community by radicalisation and surveillance; reflections on work by risk and crisis. Entertainment reinforces the same tropes: films and television serials recycle nuclear explosions, pandemics, biological weapons, and apocalyptic wars as standard narratives. Literature mirrors this culture, from dystopian novels to thrillers filled with terror cells and rogue states. A generation has grown up

within an imagination colonised by the architecture of fear. To live in this linguistic environment is to inherit a world where existence itself is equated with permanent danger. Entropy describes the dispersal of energy in physics; in language it describes the dispersal of meaning. The more often words of horror are repeated, the less they signify. Evil becomes an empty signifier, invoked so often that it loses substance, yet precisely in its emptiness it structures perception. Each speech, headline, and algorithmic echo contributes to this dissipation. The terms remain, but their referents dissolve, leaving behind only residue: fear without content, anxiety without resolution. This linguistic entropy explains why fear has become ordinary, why catastrophe is now experienced less as event than as atmosphere. The outcome is a culture in which fear is at once permanent and unremarkable.

Citizens are bombarded with narratives of catastrophe but do not rebel, because these narratives have been normalised as background noise. Politicians rely on this atmosphere to preserve authority, offering not visions of hope but assurances of protection. Media thrives on horror because it captures attention. Digital systems reinforce the cycle by privileging words that spark outrage and dread. Together they create a society entrapped by its own vocabulary. Evil, terrorism, rogue states, weapons of mass destruction—these are not neutral terms but the architecture of perception. They build a world in which alternatives are inconceivable. Fear ceases to be extraordinary and becomes the fabric of everyday life. What Curtis's 'HyperNormalisation' captures is less a series of historical events than the diagnosis of a linguistic condition: a world in which words, repeated endlessly, conjure realities people know to be distorted yet cannot escape, because the very tools of thought have been colonised by the grammar of fear.

'We Need a New Language After This War'

'We must find a way to speak in a common language again, a language that has a name for everything, even for a person holding a photograph of a dead child'. These words, published in the 'New York Times' article 'We Need a New Language After This War' in 2025 by an Israeli author reflecting on the present war, capture the exhaustion of language in times of violence. They express the failure of words when confronted with the raw reality of suffering, a failure so profound that it echoes the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. In that ancient tale, people tried to build ever upward, closer to the heavens, but their project collapsed when they could no longer understand one another. Each spoke in a different tongue, and communication dissolved into confusion. Today the tower takes a modern form: a society rising higher on knowledge, confidence, and purpose, but losing the ability to speak with meaning. Each person is trapped in separate vocabularies, separate feeds, separate facts, until what should be common experience becomes utterly foreign. The plea for a common language is not simply nostalgic; it recognises that words have been stretched to breaking point.

War does not only destroy lives and cities; it destroys the meanings of the very words used to justify or condemn it. Terms like justice, freedom, or civilisation, spoken endlessly in political speeches, are exposed as hollow beside images of devastation. Even words meant to carry horror—evil, terror, genocide—are emptied by repetition until they become clichés, background noise in a world accustomed to catastrophe. The reality of a dead child is unspeakable not because there are no words, but because the words have already been consumed by overuse and political manipulation. Heraclitus, centuries ago, claimed that "War is the mother of all things." It is a harsh and unsettling truth, for it suggests that conflict, not

peace, is the engine of history. War tears down what is old and forces the creation of what is new. In this sense, language itself follows the same pattern. In times of stability, words accumulate layers of abstraction and hypocrisy, building like bricks into a tower of rhetoric. They grow detached from the lived world, serving power more than truth. When war comes, the tower collapses. Words are stripped of their false grandeur, leaving silence and fragments. Out of this silence, a new language must be forged, one that can name what has happened and allow life to continue. This cycle repeats through history. The lofty phrases of statesmen collapse in the trenches of war. The rhetoric of civilisation and progress is buried beneath rubble and corpses. After each catastrophe, new vocabularies are invented: declarations, treaties, constitutions. Yet over time, these too become hollow, worn thin by repetition, until another conflict exposes their emptiness. The tower is built, the tower falls, and language is rebuilt again, each time with hope, each time destined to decay. The present war reveals this cycle starkly.

People continue to speak of victory, of security, of deterrence. Leaders promise justice, defence, and peace. But these words, repeated so often, no longer bear the weight of reality. When lives are destroyed, when photographs of dead children circulate, the vocabulary of power cannot encompass the truth. Ordinary people, caught between slogans and destruction, feel the futility of speech. Silence becomes more honest than words. Yet silence alone cannot rebuild; it only clears the ground. From silence must come a new attempt to name, to reconnect, to speak in a language capable of truth. The Tower of Babel story reminds us that arrogance is not the only cause of collapse. Sometimes words fail simply because they grow too far from the ground. In war, this distance becomes unbearable. People discover that their languages are not shared but fractured, each tied to ideology, faction, or propaganda. To look into another's eyes is to confront someone who lives in a different linguistic world, one that feels alien and incomprehensible. Communication fails not only across borders but within families, neighbours, and communities. Yet even in this failure lies the possibility of renewal. To recognise that words are exhausted is the first step toward creating a language that matters again. The challenge is immense, for it requires confronting not only the hypocrisy of political rhetoric but the entropic decay of language itself. It requires finding words that can carry suffering without trivialising it, that can name loss without dissolving into cliché. The photograph of a dead child demands such a language, one that acknowledges the unspeakable without retreating into silence.

Heraclitus's harsh insight returns: war gives birth to all things because it forces people to rebuild not only their cities but their speech. Out of ruins, new meanings must be forged. After the collapse of the tower, people scatter, yet they begin again to name the world. The same must follow this war. The exhausted vocabulary of fear, security, and civilisation cannot be rebuilt as it is; it has already failed. What is needed is a language that speaks with honesty, that unites rather than divides, that acknowledges reality without collapsing into propaganda. Until such a language is born, the tower will rise again, hollow as before, destined for collapse.

Retreat Into the Towers of Cyberspace

'HyperNormalisation' also traced how, after the disillusionment of the Iraq war, people in Britain and America turned away from politics they no longer trusted and sought refuge in the seemingly free universe of cyberspace. The protests of 2003, among the largest in modern history, had failed to prevent the invasion, leaving millions convinced that public opinion no

longer had power over governments. Out of this failure came retreat, not into apathy but into digital towers that promised liberation from lies, hypocrisy, and the rigid hierarchies of the old order. Cyberspace was imagined as a parallel universe, a place where creativity, self-expression, and freedom might flourish beyond the reach of corrupt institutions. Yet like the mythic Tower of Babel, it soon revealed its own fragility. The same laws of entropy that dismantled the structures of civilisation and language in the physical world began to operate in the digital one, scattering meaning, fragmenting communities, and turning utopian promises into disappointment.

By the mid-2000s, cyberspace had already become a complex system governed by algorithms. Drawing on models from economics and artificial intelligence, these algorithms treated human beings as predictable agents driven by self-interest. The result was a simplification of human life into narrow patterns of behaviour, producing what Jaron Lanier warned would be cartoon versions of people trapped in feedback loops. Users saw not the world itself but the caricatures that machines predicted they wanted. The promise of freedom was undermined by opacity, as algorithms served not individuals but hidden corporate and political interests. The illusion that cyberspace could escape the violence of the real world was quickly shattered. The spread of violent imagery online showed that cyberspace was not an escape from the horrors of the real world but another arena in which fear and violence could circulate in new forms. At the same time, governments quickly recognised the internet as a tool of surveillance, harvesting vast amounts of private data in the name of security. Individuals, meanwhile, embraced the apparent freedom of creating online identities, unaware that algorithms were constantly monitoring and shaping their behaviour. What seemed like liberation was increasingly revealed as a system of control. The rise of social media deepened this paradox: filtering mechanisms created personalised echo chambers that isolated users from differing perspectives, reducing the world to algorithmic bubbles of affirmation. Thus cyberspace, celebrated as a space of openness, became another enclosure. The illusion of digital freedom clashed with the reality of hidden concentrations of power. Yet despite this, moments of renewed hope arose when cyberspace was seen as a tool for radical change, as in global protest movements and uprisings that relied on online platforms to mobilise crowds and spread ideas. For a brief time, it appeared that digital networks could dismantle authoritarian structures and create leaderless forms of democracy. But these movements soon exposed the limits of cyberspace as a political tool: uprisings collapsed into chaos, repression, or fragmentation, revealing that while the internet could summon collective energy, it could not build lasting institutions or provide coherent visions for the future. The retreat into cyberspace was therefore marked by cycles of hope and disillusionment. The internet amplified voices, summoned crowds, and toppled regimes, yet it lacked the capacity to generate enduring alternatives. Outrage burned quickly but faded, leaving fragmentation and repression in its wake. The dream of cyberspace as an escape from the failures of politics collapsed into a new form of politics—one defined not by debate or imagination but by data, algorithms, and surveillance. The deeper tragedy was that the retreat from the crumbling towers of the real world into the towers of cyberspace only reproduced the same cycle of collapse.

Language in the digital realm suffered entropy as it did in the physical world. Words were drained of meaning, recycled into slogans, hashtags, and memes, until they became hollow yet unavoidable. The promise of a new universe dissolved into echo chambers and spectacles, governed by systems more diffuse and less accountable than the institutions they replaced. What emerged was not liberation but entrapment. Cyberspace offered towers of Babel built of code

rather than stone, but they too fell under the law of entropy. The retreat into digital realms proved disappointing because it could not free people from the cycles of collapse that have always governed language, society, and civilisation. Instead, it mirrored them, reminding us that no matter how high the towers rise—whether of words or of code—they are destined to crumble, scattering their builders in disillusionment once again. In the aftermath of such collapses, people may turn back to their local languages and dialects, drawing on traditions and folklore as a way to recover meaning and rebuild community outside the fallen towers of universal systems.

Grim Language of Common People

The words of the Brothers Grimm endure not because they polished fairy tales into genteel fables but because they preserved the rough idioms of a culture that spoke about life in blunt, often brutal, terms. Their collections preserved the language of small communities where cruelty, suffering, and reversals of fortune were not narrative inventions but everyday realities. It may be that folklore and dialects, carried in their linguistic form, preserved echoes of the universal laws that govern life. Unlike refined French fairy tales versions, the Grimms sought to capture the unvarnished voice of the people, a language in which cruelty and suffering were part of daily speech and therefore part of collective memory. Their tales were not mere diversions for children but artefacts of how ordinary people imagined fate, fortune, and survival. This fidelity to popular speech was inseparable from the brothers' nationalist vision. In a Germany still fractured into states, they believed common language and lore could unify the people more than decrees or armies. Their monumental *Deutsches Wörterbuch* aimed to record the German tongue in its depth and variety, treating language as the true record of the *Volksseele*. Influenced by the jurist Savigny, they rejected the idea of culture imposed from above, instead insisting that tradition grew from below, from the idioms, songs, and tales exchanged in households and villages. Collecting and codifying folklore was therefore political work, a way of resisting fragmentation and foreign domination by rooting identity in speech.

Yet this same project carried tensions. By standardising language into dictionaries and published tales, they risked stripping away the local vitality they cherished. The very act of preserving threatened to fossilise. The tales themselves revealed a darkness not as invention but as reflection of life. In Hessian villages, stories carried survival strategies: warnings against strangers, examples of betrayal, punishments for cruelty, rewards for endurance. Their speech did not shy away from blood, betrayal, or grief, and the Grimms transcribed it faithfully. The result was prose stripped of embellishment, marked instead by immediacy. Oral storytelling had no need for literary refinement; it was communal and pragmatic. In capturing it, the Grimms gave voice to the blunt moral imagination of their people, showing that language was not only communication but a vessel of psychological resilience. Their own lives embodied the same uncompromising spirit. Both resisted Napoleon's occupation, joined the Göttingen Seven against autocratic rule, and endured exile and professional instability for their principles. For Jacob especially, scholarship was inseparable from politics. To document German was to bind a people together. But the danger of this vision soon became evident. Folk tales that celebrated cultural pride were later appropriated by nationalist and racial ideologies. Nazi propagandists embraced the Grimm corpus as evidence of Germanic destiny. After 1945, their stories were

banned in some classrooms, symbols of how easily folk language could be turned to destructive ends. This was an unintended consequence of their project: the line between authentic cultural identity and exclusionary ideology proved perilously thin. The mythology they preserved also seeded the imagination of composers and artists. Wagner drew on their themes, romanticising Germanic antiquity. Painters, poets, and educators found inspiration in their collections. Yet with each adaptation, the rawness of oral idioms softened, bent to middle-class morality and national grandeur. Even Wilhelm revised tales, changing mothers into stepmothers and excising sexual elements. What remained, however, was still haunted by loss, cruelty, and doom. The entropic cycle persisted: each generation reshaped the tales, yet their core of darkness endured. The persistence of such motifs across centuries suggests that entropy governs language itself—meaning disperses, is reassembled, but never escapes its tendency toward fragmentation and decay.

The Grimms' dictionary project revealed this paradox. Entries mixed scholarly rigor with personal touches, recording proverbs, regional idioms, and archaic forms. They believed that words contained the true record of a people's history, more than chronicles or laws. But in fixing them to paper, they changed them, introducing permanence into what had been fluid. Dialects and oral improvisations could not survive intact. Language, once standardised, risked losing its living spontaneity. In this sense, the project both saved and buried the Volksseele, mirroring the fate of their fairy tales: preserved, circulated, but transformed. The darkness of their stories was therefore not invention but fidelity to how common people spoke of existence. For villagers, cruelty was not an aberration but part of the cycle of life, just as fortune could turn to ruin and back again. The Grimms recorded this worldview, one that saw no insulation from suffering, no euphemistic escape. In doing so, they created a body of work that was truer to experience than to optimism. Such language was brutal but cohesive; it bound communities with shared metaphors of doom, resilience, and survival. The fairy tales were not escapes but mirrors of a reality where entropy reigned. In the end, the Grimms remind us that even in returning to folk speech or romantic visions of the past, entropy cannot be avoided. The Tower of Language rises and collapses in cycles, and even the tales of peasants carry within them the same inevitability of decay. Doom, cruelty, and reversal remain the grammar of human imagination, whether in folklore, literature, or modern politics. The "grim" quality of their language lies not in pessimism but in authenticity. By transcribing the blunt words of ordinary people, they revealed a truth: that the cycle of entropy governs not only civilisation and politics but the very words through which humans try to preserve their world. The words of the Brothers Grimm were dark for a reason, for in their shadows they carried the timeless knowledge that human fate.

Evil in Greek Mythology

Elizabeth Robins, in her article 'Evil in Greek Mythology' argues that Greek mythology was less about rigid moral divisions than about recognising destruction and creation as equally necessary forces, with gods embodying both extremes under the rule of fate. This worldview reflected an acceptance of life's balance, where shadow gave meaning to light and existence, despite its troubles, was embraced as inherently beautiful. The gods are evil for a reason. In Greek mythology, darkness, danger, catastrophe, and doom were not merely threats; they were

instruments of art, crafted to ignite fear and horror and then to release them in the ritual of catharsis. As Aristotle observed in his *Poetics*, the essence of tragedy lies in evoking pity and fear in the audience so that, through an emotional purgation, they leave the theatre lighter, wiser, and cleansed. This paradoxical power of myth and tragedy is at the core of Greek culture: evil and suffering are not only realities to be endured but essential dramatic devices that teach, balance, and purify. Unlike later mythologies that divide the world into forces of pure good and pure evil, the Greeks imagined a universe without devils who exist solely to corrupt. Their cosmos was populated instead by gods, heroes, monsters, and spirits who could be destructive, cruel, and dangerous, yet not malicious in an absolute sense. Their actions sprang from necessity, passion, or balance rather than an abstract love of wickedness.

Monsters like Scylla or the Chimæra were not tempters of the soul but embodiments of physical danger, as real and terrifying as storms at sea or beasts in the wilderness. To confront them was to dramatise humanity's struggle against fate, chance, and the unpredictable powers of nature. Greek tragedy turned this struggle into a spectacle. Heroes like Oedipus became the vessels through which the audience could experience pity and fear. The suffering of these figures reminded citizens that no one was exempt from fortune's reversals, that guilt and error could transform even kings into exiles or victims. Yet their downfall was not staged to terrify indefinitely. Instead, the chorus, the structure, and the conclusion of the play guided the audience toward catharsis. Terror was invoked in order to be discharged. In the safety of the theatre, Athenians could face the chaos of existence, weep with pity, tremble with fear, and then return home purged, restored to balance. The gods themselves provided the material for such drama. They were not moral exemplars but larger-than-life figures embodying the passions and contradictions of humanity. Their ambiguity was essential: Olympus offered no pure goodness, only a mirror of humanity magnified and immortalised. In presenting divinity as dangerous, unpredictable, and often cruel, myth prepared the ground for tragedy, where the gods' caprice became the backdrop of human suffering. Yet the Greeks also saw necessity beyond the gods. Fate—embodied in the Moirai, or Fates—set limits even Zeus could not defy. Nemesis struck those who rose too high, restoring balance through catastrophe. The Furies, terrifying avengers of blood-guilt, haunted murderers until they were driven to confession or madness. These figures were dreadful but not diabolic; their purpose was to restore order where it had been broken. Evil in Greek myth thus functioned less as an absolute opposite of good than as a necessary corrective force. Winter was as vital as summer; destruction cleared the ground for renewal. This worldview carried into the audience's experience of tragedy. In watching heroes fall, spectators did not simply recoil in fear—they recognised the order beneath disorder, the inevitability of limits, the folly of hubris. Catharsis was both emotional and intellectual: a lesson in balance disguised as a drama of horror. By staging the worst possible scenarios—patricide, incest, betrayal, divine punishment—tragedy allowed citizens to process their own fears of catastrophe in controlled form.

It was, as Aristotle suggested, a cheap but effective therapy: people confronted the abyss without falling into it. Even in mythology's darker corners, the Greeks revealed their refusal to separate destruction from beauty. Hades was grim but necessary; Persephone's descent each year gave fertility to the earth. Aphrodite's gifts of love could lead to strife as easily as joy. The myths of Troy are soaked in blood, yet they inspired the greatest poetry. Doom was not merely threat but also occasion for art, reflection, and insight. Later traditions often softened or

moralised these stories, turning them into cautionary tales about sin and punishment. But in their original form, they show a profound acceptance of entropy: the awareness that all things collapse, that civilisation rises and falls, and that human life is bounded by suffering as well as delight. Myth and tragedy mirrored this cycle, making audiences face the inevitability of destruction while offering release through art. The brilliance of Greek storytelling lies in this double gesture: it terrifies in order to heal. Words like “evil,” “doom,” or “catastrophe” were not ends in themselves but catalysts of catharsis. By invoking dread and horror, myth freed citizens from those very emotions. The gods were evil for a reason, the tragedies cruel for a purpose: only through facing darkness could the Greeks hope to glimpse harmony. Evil in Greek mythology is less a moral category than a dramatic necessity. The suffering in language purifies suffering in life. The Greeks understood that the stories of gods and heroes had to create evil, danger, and doom, for only by passing through terror could human beings find balance, wisdom, and relief.

The Idea of Hell has Shaped the West

Vinson Cunningham’s 2019 essay ‘How the Idea of Hell Has Shaped the Way We Think’ explores how visions of Hell, more vividly imagined than Heaven, have influenced religion, politics, literature, and the moral imagination of the West. He argues that Hell is not only a source of terror but also a framework for reflection on justice, mercy, and the consequences of human choice, with journeys through Hell in literature and life often yielding insight. Enduring as a cultural lens, Hell continues to shape how people interpret catastrophe, injustice, and suffering, making it a defining feature of the Western imagination whether or not one believes in its literal existence. The paradox of Hell—why it exists if God is good and why evil is permitted—shaped Western civilisation by sustaining open debate about justice, suffering, and the meaning of life. More than a theological construct, Hell became a cultural lens and dramatic mirror through which poets, theologians, and artists confronted fear, morality, and human desire, defining the West through the imagery of punishment rather than reward. In ancient literature, the underworld was less a realm of pure malice than a mirror of life’s harsh realities, where suffering and punishment served not to condemn but to give tragedy moral purpose and to reveal destruction as a necessary element of existence. In such stories the paradox is already present—if the gods are good, why do they permit such agony?

Christianity absorbed these traditions, merging them with Jewish notions of Sheol and Gehenna, and produced the fiery Hell that dominated medieval imagination. Here the paradox deepened: if God was love, how could He consign souls to eternal torment? Yet it was precisely this tension that kept theological debate alive. Thinkers from Augustine to Aquinas wrestled with the dilemma, each interpretation spawning further reflection and art. Dante’s ‘Inferno’ gave the most memorable literary form to this paradox. His Hell was not chaos but order—punishments fitted to sins with meticulous precision, treachery punished most severely, with Judas, Cassius, and Brutus chewed eternally in the mouths of Satan. The evil of God’s allowance became, paradoxically, a revelation of divine justice. In Dante’s vision the gates of Hell became not only warnings but also maps of moral consequence, forcing readers to consider their own complicity. The imaginative hold of Hell endured because it offered catharsis. Aristotle had described tragedy as the purging of pity and fear, and Hell served a similar role: it ignited terror in the

audience, only to release them through reflection. To descend imaginatively into Hell—whether through epic poetry, mystery plays, sermons, or paintings—was to experience horror in safety, to face the possibility of doom without perishing in it. The paradox of Hell thus fuelled the creative energy of the West, its very contradictions ensuring that art, politics, and theology could never settle into complacency. In later centuries, the imagery of Hell slipped into secular language. Politicians invoked it to dramatise crisis; reformers used it to condemn injustice. From fiery pulpits to modern speeches about “American carnage” or climate catastrophe, the rhetoric of Hell has shaped how societies understand threats. The question always lingered: are we already living in Hell on earth, created by our own cruelty and violence? This notion opened space for social critique, for movements against slavery, poverty, and war often framed their cause as a fight against hellish conditions.

The paradox remained: a good God was invoked to justify hope, while the endurance of evil demanded explanation, anger, and change. The gods of myth had long modelled this duality. Cronus devoured his children, Hera pursued vengeance with relentless cruelty. Their “evil” was not gratuitous but catalytic, setting stories in motion, shaping cycles of death and renewal, famine and fertility. Without their darkness, there would be no tale, no reflection, no catharsis. In this sense Hell, like the gods’ cruelty, is evil for a reason: it sustains the narrative tension that allows human beings to confront the fragility of their world. The paradox of divine evil continued into modern times, where the powers once attributed to gods were assumed by human hands. The atomic bomb seemed to fulfil the mythic terror of absolute destruction, echoing Oppenheimer’s haunting words from the ‘Bhagavad Gita’: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” Here the paradox reached its peak: the human capacity for creation had fused with the divine capacity for annihilation. Hell was no longer a mythic place but a technological possibility, forcing Western civilisation to confront the fact that its own progress carried within it the seeds of its destruction. This long entanglement of Hell with culture demonstrates that the West defined itself not by erasing paradox but by cultivating it. The idea of Hell has shaped the world precisely because it is unanswerable. It insists that goodness cannot be understood without its opposite, that justice must grapple with cruelty, that creation carries the shadow of destruction. By leaving the question open—why does God allow evil?—Western civilisation ensured that meaning would always be contested and imagination never free of darkness. Each generation is thus compelled to face the infernal mirror of its own time. Dante’s Heaven lulls, but his Hell still burns in the imagination.

Hollywood vs. The World

Michael Medved in ‘Hollywood vs. America’ described the entertainment industry as a poison factory, corrupting its audience instead of uplifting it. What was once promoted as a dream factory, offering moral clarity and reinforcing the values of faith, family, and patriotism, became an industry that often mocks religion, undermines families, derides national loyalty, and glorifies brutality. This transformation raises the question of whether Hollywood’s collapse into decadence was simply a failure of leadership or whether it reflected a deeper appetite for destruction within modern culture—an entropic law that drags every system of meaning toward decay and collapse. At its birth, Hollywood was imagined as a pulpit of democratic virtue. The Motion Picture Production Code, or Hays Code, set out explicit rules to ensure that art served

moral order. Marriage was to be honoured, authority respected, and crime punished. Sin could be portrayed only if its consequences were made clear. The purpose was not merely to censor but to ensure that the new mass medium reinforced the symbolic structures of society. Cinema was supposed to bind communities together in shared recognition of right and wrong. But this moral consensus could not withstand the appetite for spectacle.

Audiences were drawn to images that broke taboos, and the industry discovered that scandal sold better than sermons. By the 1960s the Code collapsed, and the gates opened to images of violence, profanity, and vulgarity. What had once been forbidden was now not only permitted but celebrated. Religion became a target of ridicule, patriotism was depicted as hypocrisy, and family life as a prison. Instead of preaching morality, Hollywood began to stage its demolition. The dream factory reversed into a poison factory because mass culture itself demanded a steady diet of destruction. What was once a pulpit became a theatre of transgression. This shift, however, did not mean that Hollywood ceased to perform the function of myth. From ancient times, communities told stories of evil to orient themselves. Greek tragedies staged suffering, Biblical texts warned of sin, medieval legends conjured devils, and epics filled with monsters offered collective reflection on danger and death. Hollywood simply inherited this function, but in modern form. In a secular mass society without shared religion, the movie screen became the new stage on which communities gathered to confront evil. What audiences consumed was not only spectacle but fear itself, given shape and voice through the language of film. Medved's surveys show that people often complained about Hollywood's excesses. They said they disliked the profanity, were offended by sexual licence, and disturbed by brutality. Yet they kept watching. This paradox is at the heart of myth: the monster must be hated, but it must also be seen. Outrage is itself part of the ritual, a way of binding the community through shared recognition of what it finds abhorrent. Even disgust becomes a form of participation. The film may glorify crime or mock religion, but its deeper function is to remind society of its own shadows. The poison of Hollywood lies in the way it uses language. Words that once described particular acts—"killer", "apocalypse", "alien"—now conjure entire mythologies. The language of fear has become a cultural system, repeated across film, television, music, and advertising until it saturates the imagination. In small communities evil was local, but in mass societies it must grow in scale to match the collective mind. Hollywood provides this inflation of horror, giving urban civilisation its myths of corruption, chaos, and collapse.

The controversy surrounding violent and vulgar spectacles shows how the dynamic works. Millions tuned in, not to admire beauty, but to witness transgression. The chaos of its imagery—children and animals morphing, violence erupting—provoked disgust and fascination alike. What mattered was not coherence but the creation of a collective reaction. In this way the industry continued the oldest role of myth: to shock, to horrify, and thereby to unite people through a common language of fear. What began as an effort to teach morality through film has therefore inverted into its opposite. Hollywood discovered that evil, corruption, and brutality sell better than virtue, and so it continues to produce them. This is not merely a commercial decision but an expression of the cultural entropy that drives civilisations toward collapse. The dream factory became a poison factory because the appetite for destruction proved stronger than the appetite for order. Yet the function remains the same. Just as ancient myths staged monsters and gods to confront evil, Hollywood stages crime, apocalypse, and corruption. The difference is that where older myths led to catharsis and reflection, modern myths often leave

only emptiness and despair. Still, people return, for the language of fear cannot be abolished. Hollywood may degrade its audience, but it continues to bind them together through horror. In the end, Hollywood vs. the world is not simply a battle of morals but the drama of civilisation itself. Every society must tell stories of evil, but in mass culture those stories become poison. The dream of beauty decays into spectacle of destruction, yet both spring from the same source: the human need for myth. What Hollywood reveals is that this need will never disappear, even if the myths themselves corrode the very values they once upheld. Hollywood was born to uplift but endures by poisoning, proving that fear, not virtue, is the language that still binds the world together.

Military-Industrial Horror Complex

In 'Hollywood vs. America', Michael Medved opens the chapter 'A Bias for the Bizarre' with an anecdote that captures the central sickness of modern mass culture. He recalls how a film publicist assured him that Peter Greenaway's 'The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover' was witty, sophisticated, even amusing for audiences who disliked violence. Instead, what he encountered was a spectacle of grotesquery—filth, mutilation, cannibalism—presented not as depravity but as art. Critics hailed it as “profound” and “intelligent”, praising its very ugliness as proof of depth. For Medved, the betrayal lay not only in the film but in the way language itself was used to elevate degradation into myth. What should repel was reframed through words that clothed horror with prestige. Language, like a great tower, always sinks under its own weight, and the higher it rises the stronger the pull toward vulgarisation that drags it down. In the vocabulary of mass entertainment, this tendency becomes stark: words meant to inspire beauty or nobility are twisted into ironic, satiric, and aggressive rhetoric. Official language grows complex and stylised, yet in the same breath becomes cruel, scripted, stereotypical, vulgar, and non-empathic. It is constructed not to connect but to wound, not to foster love but to induce pain and humiliation.

This is the paradox Medved identifies: the very language that promises sophistication collapses into a ritual of degradation. The story of the film's reception demonstrates how language frames perception. A publicist did not merely describe a work but spun a narrative: “dark comedy”, “terribly witty”, “brilliant satire”. These words prepared audiences for humour and sophistication, not brutality. Once critics joined with terms such as “splendid” and “profound”, the grotesque was mythologised as art. In this way, language no longer reflected reality but transformed it, turning horror into ritual. This transformation is not new. In ancient tragedy, ritual sacrifice, and myth, societies confronted death and evil by staging them in story. Fear was not hidden but given form, binding communities through shared horror. In the mass society of the modern age, film and entertainment fulfil the same role. But the difference lies in scale and in irony: critics and institutions now sanctify revulsion itself as the highest revelation. Audiences are told that disgust is proof of profundity, that shock is a kind of collective initiation. Horror is no longer a by-product of story but its central function. Medved's refusal to accept this logic exposed the deeper battle over language. Critics, he notes, are trained to avoid moral judgment, restricting themselves to technical evaluation—cinematography, acting, editing. To speak of morality is to be branded “judgmental”, a word now treated as more offensive than cruelty itself. Here language functions as a weapon of control: by shifting meanings, it silences

those who resist. The vulgarisation of discourse is thus not accidental but deliberate, a means of protecting the mythology of horror. This mythology rests on a cultural conviction that horror is truer than beauty. Earlier traditions valued harmony, nobility, or inspiration; now shock and outrage are treated as authentic. What once was obscene is sanctified as meaningful, while beauty is dismissed as sentimentality. Language has become the tool for turning revulsion into revelation. The definition of “art” is stretched to include displays of bodily remains, ritualised obscenity, and performances of degradation. These choices are not neutral; they are linguistic redefinitions.

The vocabulary of art has shifted so that “daring” displaces “beautiful”, and “authentic” replaces “noble”. In this way, the tower of culture is rebuilt upon words that sanctify horror. Hollywood’s prestige films mirror the same pattern. Works filled with torture, perverse sexuality, and incoherent violence are praised not for inspiration but for shock. Their defenders insist that revulsion is meaningful, that to recoil is to see truth. The logic is inverted: the more an audience despises what it sees, the greater the claim of profundity. Again, language provides the frame. “Serious”, “provocative”, and “visionary” turn horror into revelation, convincing audiences that darkness itself is enlightenment. At the heart of this mythology is fear. Just as ancient societies gathered at sacrifices to face death together, modern audiences gather before screens to experience terror. The critic’s role is to bless this ritual, to assure people that horror is not only permissible but necessary. Awards ceremonies complete the process, exalting portrayals of killers, sadists, and maniacs while ignoring stories of nobility. Darkness becomes the measure of greatness, a cultural canon forged not in inspiration but in degradation. To call horror profound is not description but imposition, an attempt to force a mythology of vulgarisation. The pattern is clear: grotesque, vulgar, and shocking narratives are elevated, while beauty and inspiration are ignored. Freedom becomes a mask for preference, and the language of “diversity” conceals a bias for the bizarre. What Medved ultimately uncovers is that language in mass society no longer uplifts but terrifies. Storytelling has become modern mythology, and its central grammar is horror. The words chosen by critics, institutions, and artists redefine vulgarity as authenticity and revulsion as profundity. Words like disgusting, obnoxious, hideous, dreadful, shocking, sickening, wicked, horrible, obscene, abhorrent, repugnant, horrendous, horrific etc. become just part of the advertising poster. Horror is endlessly replayed, sanctified, and consumed, until it binds society not through beauty or love but through shared fear. Language rises like a tower, but under the law of vulgarisation it collapses into dust, leaving horror as the grammar of modern mythology and fear as the only truth that unites the mass audience.

Engineering of Social Psychopathy

In 'Hollywood vs. America', in the chapter 'Motivations for Madness', Michael Medved argued that the entertainment industry no longer reflects society but distorts it. It glorifies violence, trivialises traditional values, and spreads despair. Yet what his critique reveals is not simply poor taste or artistic decadence but a deeper transformation in the cultural logic of mental illness. In mass society, language and storytelling have become the central means by which collective imagination is structured. Songs, films, and television shows function as modern myths, shaping what is considered normal, what is feared, and what is admired.

Increasingly, these myths normalise behaviours that once would have been recognised as pathological. To act like a Hollywood hero, to speak in its violent clichés, or to model one's identity on its images of despair has become the expected, even the celebrated, pattern of life. The ruling ideology of the present insists that mental illness is only an individual chemico-biological problem. Anxiety, depression, alienation, and despair are framed as disorders in brain chemistry to be managed with drugs or therapy. This view has enormous benefits for capitalism. It severs suffering from its social and cultural roots and turns it into a private problem to be medicated rather than a political problem to be questioned.

To ask whether mass media images, pop music, or Hollywood narratives induce despair is dismissed as unscientific or moralistic. Yet if pathology is shaped by the culture that surrounds us, then the normalisation of despair in entertainment is itself an engineering of social psychopathy. Language lies at the centre of this process. Directors, critics, and publicists insist that their works 'reflect reality'. But the language they use reshapes that reality. Words such as gritty, dark, provocative, or authentic do not describe neutrally but elevate distortions into truth. A film that degrades sexuality, ridicules religion, or glamorises violence is praised as bold. Any story that affirms dignity or hope risks being dismissed as sentimental. This linguistic sleight of hand turns pathology into profundity. Just as ancient societies once sanctified sacrifice and fear in ritual, mass society sanctifies despair by dressing it in the vocabulary of art. The effect is cumulative. George Gerbner's research showed that television presents six to eight acts of violence per hour. For viewers, this repetition shifts expectation so that brutality comes to seem not exceptional but ordinary. Genres labelled cop drama, thriller, or urban realism function as linguistic cues that teach audiences to expect corruption, murder, and decay. What begins as fiction becomes an orientation toward life, a mental framework in which fear is the natural condition. This is not merely depiction but prescription. Language constructs the very categories by which audiences interpret their own existence. The consequence is a pedagogy of despair in which children and adults alike learn its grammar before they encounter alternative vocabularies of meaning. Pop icons display rebellion as fashion. Rap lyrics equate authenticity with violence. Blockbusters teach that chaos and corruption are inevitable. Neil Postman observed that television abolishes secrecy and exposes children to sex, death, and destruction with none of the filters once provided by print culture. Saturated with these narratives, young audiences are initiated into a cultural order where pathology is not recognised as deviant but embraced as normal. Language here functions as indoctrination: to be cynical is realistic, to be violent is authentic, to despair is to be profound.

The absence of counter-stories intensifies this effect because media rarely portrays kindness, patience, or quiet dignity. This absence itself is a linguistic act. By refusing to name or narrate goodness, culture implies it no longer exists. Silence is as powerful as speech. A world where all stories end in betrayal, humiliation, or brutality is a world where hope appears naïve and moral aspiration absurd. The language of despair becomes the only serious vocabulary available. The normalisation of pathology through mass culture is revealed most clearly in the way behaviour once condemned becomes celebrated once reframed linguistically. What was indecency becomes fashion. What was obscenity becomes art. What was psychopathy becomes authenticity. Audiences are taught not only what to fear but how to name it, until the vocabulary of pathology displaces the vocabulary of health. Mental illness is depoliticised, stripped of its cultural context, and presented as an individual misfortune rather than a collective condition. The political implication is profound. If despair is only a private chemical imbalance, then society is absolved of responsibility for creating the conditions that breed despair. The true

horror of this critique lies not in the content of any single film or song but in the broader linguistic order they sustain. Stories of horror and despair are not anomalies but the modern myths of mass society that teach audiences to expect pathology as the norm. To imitate the Hollywood hero, to internalise the pop lyric of violence, to accept the cinematic image of corruption—these are not accidents but lessons repeated until they are second nature.

Culture engineers social psychopathy by ensuring pathology is no longer shocking but normal, no longer a warning but a way of life. Language is the decisive instrument in this process. It frames despair as depth, violence as authenticity, and pathology as normalcy. In doing so, it transforms mental illness from a challenge to society into a permanent condition of culture. What is called sickness in the soul is not simply an artistic failing but the deliberate effect of a system in which stories function as myths of despair. In the modern mythology of mass entertainment, horror is not a genre but the grammar of life, and mental illness is not an exception but the expected state of the modern subject. Hollywood's engineering of social psychopathy is a politics of pathology that serves capitalism by depoliticising despair. It redefines collective wounds as private disorders and turns suffering into a profitable, endless commodity.

5. The Horror of Civilisation

Horror and Civilisation

Why does the entertainment industry persist in privileging horror, violence, obscenity, and despair, even when audiences themselves long for optimism, restraint, and family-friendly stories? This is not simply the result of greed or misjudgement but a deeper compulsion built into the nature of language and storytelling itself. In mass society, language does not only reflect reality but constructs it, shaping imagination and defining what people accept as normal or pathological. Stories across all media function as modern myths. They bind millions of strangers into a single symbolic order, and increasingly that order is defined not by beauty or virtue but by horror. Language thrives on disruption. Every civilisation begins with clear, shared meanings, but as language grows it drifts toward vulgarisation. Old forms lose vitality, and shock or obscenity becomes the means of producing novelty. A single word, repeated endlessly, gains its power not from meaning but from desecration. Obscenity becomes a kind of linguistic entropy: the breakdown of boundaries that makes space for new expressions. Films or songs saturated with vulgarity and violence are not simply mistakes; they are symptoms of this entropic cycle. Horror and grotesque imagery become the grammar of seriousness, while words like gritty, raw, or authentic elevate despair into profundity.

In ancient myth, sacrifice and fear provided ritual cohesion. In modern mass society, horror performs the same function. Stories of killers, corruption, and apocalypse work not as mirrors of reality but as collective ceremonies that bind people through shared fear. The language surrounding such stories transforms brutality into truth. To describe a narrative as hard-edged or unflinching is to sanctify despair as authenticity. Mass storytelling teaches audiences to see corruption and destruction as inevitable and to treat fear as the most genuine of human emotions. The cycle is structural rather than conspiratorial. Civilisations do not collapse because artists choose ugliness but because language itself exhausts its inherited symbols. To remain vital, it must transgress its own taboos. This is why vulgarity and horror emerge even against commercial logic. The public may prefer optimism, but language resists stasis and

insists on breaking boundaries. Obscenity, irony, and despair are the forms through which new myths are invented. The grotesque replaces the noble not as an accident but as the inevitable product of linguistic entropy. The process is cumulative. Media presents endless acts of violence, and repetition shifts expectation until brutality seems ordinary. Genres become linguistic signals: cop drama or thriller promise corruption and decay, while dystopian visions of the future normalise despair. Children are initiated into this pedagogy of pathology from an early age. Stories of sex, death, and destruction fill the space once reserved for secrecy or gradual initiation. To be cynical is recast as realistic, to despair as profound, to be violent as authentic. The absence of counter-stories is itself a linguistic act, for silence about kindness or dignity makes them appear relics of the past. The vulgarisation of language is therefore perceived as moral collapse, but it is also the precondition of renewal. Civilisations lament their grotesque myths as symptoms of decline, yet decline is also revelation. Horror stories expose the emptiness of old symbols and prepare the ground for new meanings.

When societies seem to drown in vulgarity, they are in fact entering a stage of transformation. Each cycle of decay carries within it the seeds of invention. Horror in mass storytelling is not simply entertainment but ritual. The grotesque becomes a sacrament, purging exhausted meanings and binding people through shared terror. Children raised in an atmosphere of horror grow fluent in cynicism and despair because they are initiated into the current stage of civilisation's cycle. What appears as corruption of values is also the training ground for new linguistic forms. Horror, obscenity, and despair are not terminal conditions but necessary steps in the perpetual reinvention of myth. Civilisation cannot return to innocence, nor can it halt the entropy of language. To demand purity and optimism in public storytelling is to demand the impossible, for language survives by consuming itself. Horror is not a deviation but the natural product of linguistic innovation. Every culture reaches a stage where its myths revolve around gore and despair, and every culture denounces this as decline. Yet decline clears the ground for renewal. The cycle ensures that language enslaves humanity not by conspiracy but by its very nature: to create, it must first destroy. Horror and vulgarity are not accidents but necessary stages of linguistic renewal. Civilisation trembles at its own grotesque stories, but in doing so it participates in the eternal cycle of language, myth, and meaning. Horror in the entertainment industry mirrors the reality of wars, mass killings, and collective suffering, binding spectacle to real violence in a cycle of endless repetition. Unlike catharsis, which once cleansed the soul through fear and pity, the language of horror offers only a cheap substitute, leaving audiences trapped in perpetual dread as they scroll to the next scene of terror without release.

Entropy and Evil

In *Entropy and Evil*, Robert John Russell explores the relationship between theological understandings of evil and the scientific concept of entropy, a metaphor that, when reframed through the lens of myth and storytelling, reveals how the figure of the 'evil' god may have been crafted to deepen drama, mystery, and resonance across centuries. The ancient storytellers of Greece knew that tales of gods as purely benevolent beings would lose their grip on the imagination. To ensure that their myths endured, they shaped their divine figures with contradictions, flaws, and even outright cruelty. "Evil" in these stories was not simply a reflection of moral judgement; it was a dramatic device, a way to personify chaos, vengeance, ambition, and destruction. The gods' apparent malevolence gave myth the same enduring

quality that Russell associates with entropy—irreversibility and inevitability—keeping these narratives alive in cultural memory long after their original religious function had faded.

The Greek gods, far from moral exemplars, acted in ways that mirrored the full range of human behaviour. Hera persecuted rivals and the illegitimate children of Zeus with a relentlessness that bordered on obsession. Eris sparked wars for her own amusement, throwing a golden apple into a wedding banquet to ignite jealousy and strife. Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance, could unleash punishments that far exceeded the crimes. Cronus devoured his own children to preserve his reign. Typhon, a monstrous force of nature, brought volcanic fire and earthquakes in his attempts to topple Zeus. Hades abducted Persephone and bound her to the underworld through a cunning trick. Each of these acts could be called “evil” by human standards, yet in the context of myth they were catalysts for some of the most memorable and influential stories in history. The storytellers who shaped these myths understood something essential about human attention: conflict compels. In a narrative where gods are flawless, the plot tends toward stasis. But introduce an act of treachery, jealousy, or destruction, and the story begins to move with the unpredictability of life itself. “Evil” in this sense becomes less about an absolute moral category and more about the dramatic necessity of disruption. Russell’s insight into entropy offers a parallel—systems naturally move toward disorder, and so too do stories move toward moments where order collapses. It is this collapse, whether in the form of a divine betrayal or a cosmic disaster, that invites audiences to wrestle with questions of justice, power, and fate.

Moreover, by making the gods themselves capable of great wrongdoing, ancient myths preserved the essential mystery of existence. If the divine can be both protector and destroyer, giver and taker, then the human search for meaning is never complete. The question “Why is God evil?” is unanswerable in the same way that the origins of the universe or the final fate of all things are unanswerable. By contrast, “Why is God good?” is simple to answer: because goodness comforts, sustains, and affirms life. Goodness explains itself, but evil resists explanation. This resistance, this refusal to be reduced to a neat moral equation, is what gives these stories their depth and endurance. In Greek mythology, the actions we call evil are often entangled with relatable motivations. Hera’s cruelty emerges from wounded pride and jealousy; Cronus’s brutality stems from fear of losing power; Hades’s abduction of Persephone is rooted in desire; Eris’s chaos springs from a love of conflict for its own sake; Nemesis’s punishments are framed as justice, though their severity often tips them into cruelty. Even Typhon’s catastrophic assault on Zeus can be seen as an act of loyalty to his mother Gaia, who sought revenge for the downfall of the Titans. The moral lines are blurred, suggesting that evil is rarely pure—it is often a distortion of virtues like loyalty, justice, and love when they become absolute, untempered, and unchecked.

This blurring also reflects the ancient world’s acceptance that the same forces that sustain life can also destroy it. The sea that brings trade and sustenance can also bring storms and shipwrecks; the earth that yields crops can also unleash earthquakes and volcanoes. In personifying these forces as gods, the Greeks created beings who embodied the same duality. Their divine “evil” was a mirror for the unpredictability of existence itself. Seen this way, evil in mythology is not merely an ethical judgement but a narrative necessity and a philosophical provocation. It is the storyteller’s tool for injecting uncertainty into the cosmic order, for reminding audiences that nothing—no kingdom, no love, no peace—is ever entirely secure.

This uncertainty draws listeners and readers back to the myths generation after generation, as each age reinterprets the gods' actions in light of its own struggles and fears. Russell's concept of entropy provides a modern analogue to this ancient narrative function. Just as entropy ensures that systems drift toward disorder, so too do myths drift toward conflict and disruption. In both cases, the movement toward breakdown is not merely destructive but also generative. In science, entropy drives processes that lead to new configurations of matter and energy; in myth, the gods' acts of apparent evil drive plots toward transformations, revelations, and new orders of reality.

The enduring fascination with divine evil may also arise from its proximity to ultimate power. To imagine a god is to imagine a being who can do anything. If such a being were to turn toward harm, the scale of that harm would be beyond human comprehension. This is why the most terrifying divine acts in mythology often involve threats to the entire world or cosmos. In this sense, ultimate evil for a god is not the punishment of an individual or even the destruction of a city, but the annihilation of all that exists. It is here that the mythic imagination brushes against the sublime terror described in the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna reveals his universal form to Arjuna, a form that contains the power to destroy worlds. The quote, "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendour of the Mighty One," is a paraphrase of verse 11:12 of the Bhagavad Gita, capturing the awe and terror of the cosmic form. J. Robert Oppenheimer, witnessing the first atomic bomb test in 1945, recalled this verse alongside another from 11:32: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." In that moment, the mythic vision of ultimate divine destruction became a human reality, reminding us that the capacity for world-ending power is no longer the sole domain of gods.

In conclusion, the nature of evil—whether in myth or reality—remains elusive. Is it the deed itself, the act that causes harm? Is it the intention, the thought or word aimed at malice? Or is it a call to destruction, a yearning to unmake what exists? For the gods of myth, ultimate evil could only mean the destruction of the whole world or even the universe, an act that would return all order to chaos and all life to nothingness. When humans imagine or pursue such ends, they step into the role of gods—not as creators, but as destroyers. And in that ambition lies the most terrifying truth of all: that to feel like a god, one need only be willing to end everything.

Affirming entropy

Ashley Woodward's argument begins from the observation that entropy, ever since William Thomson extended the Second Law of thermodynamics to predict the universe's eventual "heat death", has been cast in a moral light as a cosmic antagonist. Philosophers and scientists have often framed it as the naturalised equivalent of theological evil: disorder, disorganisation, dissolution and death, pitted against life, order, creativity and civilisation. This opposition appears in many philosophies of technology, from Wiener's cybernetics and Schrödinger's theory of life to Stiegler's neganthropology and Floridi's information ethics, all of which take entropy to be a force to resist. Woodward's project is to challenge that view and, from a Nietzschean perspective, affirm entropy instead. Nietzsche himself rejected the Second Law's implication of a final equilibrium, not because he found it too bleak, but because it was too consoling to pessimists like von Hartmann, who saw heat death as liberation from the restless

will. Eternal return, by contrast, was the more difficult and therefore more valuable existential test. Modern cosmology, however, undercuts Nietzsche's metaphysical argument: the universe has a finite age, the Second Law is empirically robust, and the heat death scenario is more plausible than his eternal return. If a Nietzschean affirmation of existence is to be consistent with the best current science, Woodward argues, then entropy should be affirmed.

The traditional demonisation of entropy emerges historically from Thomson's 1852 statement that mechanical energy inevitably dissipates, rendering the Earth eventually uninhabitable, and from Helmholtz's extension of that logic to the universe, predicting a state of uniform heat in which all processes cease. Clausius coined 'entropy' to describe energy so dispersed it could no longer perform work, and envisaged a slow but inexorable approach to a "limiting state" of maximum entropy. These scientific accounts were largely neutral in tone, but their implications for life encouraged later thinkers to frame entropy negatively. Schrödinger, in his influential 1944 book *What is Life?*, defined living organisms as systems that resist entropy by importing "negative entropy" (order) from their surroundings. Wiener, building on thermodynamics and information theory, equated entropy with disorder and information with order, portraying cybernetics as a fight against the "arch-enemy" entropy, a Mephistophelean devil in Augustinian form: not an independent evil, but a privation of good. Stiegler's organology and "neganthropology" placed entropy at the centre of the Anthropocene's threats, treating it as the principle of disindividuation that must be fought to preserve the processes of individuation. Floridi's information ethics explicitly called entropy metaphysical evil, defining it as the destruction or corruption of informational entities and prescribing its prevention, removal and the promotion of negentropic flourishing.

Against this entrenched opposition, Woodward returns to Nietzsche's rejection of heat death. For Nietzsche, the possibility of a final, static state was ruled out by an argument from infinite past time: if such a state were possible, it would already have been reached. From this he built his doctrine of eternal return, intended as the most demanding affirmation of life imaginable. In the context of nineteenth-century debates, this position opposed the consolation pessimists found in heat death. For Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, the endless flux of becoming was a source of suffering, and heat death promised final release. Nietzsche's eternal return denied that release: everything recurs eternally, escape impossible. Affirming such a thought would distinguish the strongest spirits. If Nietzsche had been motivated by resentment against heat death, he would have chosen it over eternal return for its existential severity. His real reason was that heat death was not severe enough—it offered hope. Today, however, cosmology has shifted the evidential balance. The Second Law is not seriously in doubt, and astronomical observations since Hubble have shown the universe to have a finite age, contradicting the infinite past premise on which Nietzsche's rejection rested. In a Nietzschean "scientific spirit", fidelity to the best available evidence demands discarding his cosmological conclusion while retaining the spirit of his philosophy. That spirit includes resisting moral dualisms, and here the supposed opposition between entropy/evil and negentropy/good begins to unravel. Traditional thermodynamics already showed that local increases in order depend on greater increases in entropy elsewhere; order and disorder are co-implicated. Far-from-equilibrium thermodynamics, as in Prigogine's work on dissipative structures, reveals that ordered patterns can emerge from highly entropic processes—order from chaos. Myth and poetry have long

linked creation with primordial chaos, and Helmholtz himself quoted Goethe's Mephistopheles to this effect.

The same logic applies to the life/death dichotomy. Schrödinger's negentropic life-process model fosters the view that entropy is death's principle, but Nietzsche warned against setting life in simple opposition to death. For him, life is a rare kind of the dead, and the highest life-instinct expresses power even at the cost of self-preservation. Affirming life in his sense often means affirming disorder, decline and death. Entropy, as the dissipation of energy, aligns with such an affirmation: to live is to transform and expend, not to conserve stasis. The order/disorder language that underwrites moralised valuations of entropy is itself questionable. Helmholtz introduced the "disorder" metaphor in 1882, and Boltzmann popularised it, but modern thermodynamics increasingly prefers the more precise notions of energy dispersal or spread. As Lambert and others have argued, "order" and "disorder" are largely subjective and aesthetic, reflecting human purposes rather than objective features of physical systems. Whether milk mixing into coffee increases or decreases order depends on what one values as ordered. Nietzsche would have welcomed the move away from such anthropomorphic metaphors, as part of a broader "de-deification" of nature necessary for a genuine naturalisation of values. Revaluing entropy, then, means recognising in it the very qualities Nietzsche sought to affirm against the life-denying tendencies of Western metaphysics: destruction, chaos, transformation, becoming. His preferred cosmology, drawn from Heraclitus, saw the world as an ever-living fire, kindled and quenched in measure, with no ultimate goal or cessation. Becoming and passing away were innocent, like a child's game of building and destroying. Anaximander's condemnation of becoming as injustice, deserving recompense in destruction, anticipated the pessimistic hope for heat death. Nietzsche reversed this valuation, embracing the ceaseless play of creation and annihilation. Clausius's own etymology of 'entropy' from the Greek for "transformation" underscores its affinity with Nietzsche's ontology. To curse entropy is to curse becoming; to affirm it is to affirm life in its fullest, most tragic sense.

From a Popperian perspective, all scientific theories remain revisable; from a Humean one, facts alone do not yield values. Yet if values are to be naturalised in fidelity to the best science, and that science points toward the universality of entropy increase, then affirmation rather than demonisation follows. Philosophies of technology, emerging from the thermodynamic study of machines, have been especially prone to import theological patterns of good and evil into their interpretations, casting negentropy as salvific and entropy as diabolical. A Nietzschean stance would reject this inheritance, refusing to project demons into the fabric of nature and instead seeking to live with it as it is. Affirming entropy does not mean welcoming suffering or destruction for their own sake; it means acknowledging that transformation, dissipation and death are inseparable from creation, concentration and life. In this light, the consequences of the Second Law are to be faced as one faces mortality: not with resignation to an enemy's victory, but with the tragic joy of participation in the whole. The more difficult the thought, the greater the affirmation it demands. In our present scientific context, this means learning, at last, to affirm entropy.

The entropic basis of collective behaviour

The article *The Entropic Basis of Collective Behaviour* by Richard P. Mann and Roman Garnett develops a novel framework for understanding how groups of intelligent agents act collectively by applying the causal entropic principle. Collective decision-making has long fascinated scientists, who have noted that groups often reach outcomes superior to those of individuals acting alone. This phenomenon, known as collective intelligence, was famously observed by Francis Galton, who showed that the averaged guesses of a crowd more accurately estimated the weight of a bull than most individual attempts. Since then, human, animal, and algorithmic groups have been shown to perform better than individuals in diverse tasks such as estimation, navigation, and prediction. The increasing global connectivity of individuals through digital networks makes the study of these dynamics even more urgent. Traditional models of collective behaviour often focus on how information is transmitted among individuals, leading to improved or distorted decision-making. These include social contagion models, quorum sensing, Bayesian updating, and information cascades. While powerful, these approaches tend to begin with the individual as the unit of analysis, which can be daunting when scaled up to millions of agents. An alternative comes from statistical mechanics and the principle of maximum entropy, which has been used to explain large-scale patterns in nature. Maximum entropy methods have successfully predicted distributions of organisms and energy usage, as well as the structure of moving groups, by assuming that observed states reflect a quasi-equilibrium sampled from a Boltzmann distribution. Building on this, the principle of maximum entropy production and the related causal entropic principle extend the analysis to systems where the components are intelligent agents. The causal entropic principle suggests that agents maximise the number of possible future paths through their actions, effectively preserving uncertainty over time.

When applied to collective behaviour, this principle can predict group cohesion and socially intelligent outcomes without assuming explicit information transfer or predefined social forces. In this view, the apparent rules of social interaction emerge naturally from the entropic logic of maximising future options. A simplified example illustrates the mechanism. Imagine a group of agents choosing between two doors. One leads to four future possibilities, the other to only one. If the group distributes itself so that most agents select the door with more options, they maximise their collective future entropy. This statistical prediction mirrors observed features of animal and human group behaviour, where individuals follow each other in ways that appear rational and cooperative, even without explicit communication. At the individual level, these interactions can be described using conditional probabilities that depend on how many others have already chosen a particular option. At the group level, the result is a distribution of choices consistent with entropy maximisation. A key implication of this model is that social interactions follow Weber's law, where responses scale with proportional rather than absolute differences in stimuli. This law is supported by empirical studies across species, including insects, fish, and humans, and has a strong basis in psychology and neuroscience. It also provides a foundation for the assumption of linearly additive social forces in many models of collective motion, such as self-propelled particle simulations of animal swarms or human crowds. These forces help explain phenomena like phase transitions between different group states and even catastrophic crowd disasters, but the entropic framework grounds them in a more fundamental principle. While compelling, the entropic approach has limitations. It does not yet capture cases where group members have conflicting information or divergent preferences. Real groups are rarely homogeneous, and variation in knowledge or personality can profoundly shape outcomes.

Future models could incorporate such heterogeneity by assigning agents different subjective probabilities for future paths. Moreover, some studies suggest nonlinear interactions better describe observed behaviours.

However, these may emerge from accumulations of many small linear interactions, combined with noise and error, rather than from fundamentally different mechanisms. Thus, Weber's law may still provide the simplest baseline model for social interaction. The entropic model also offers insights into collective motion. In continuous spaces, assumptions about spatial correlations between agents' futures naturally generate interaction rules resembling those in particle models. This suggests that complex patterns such as flocking, schooling, or crowd flows can be understood as emergent from entropic maximisation, rather than from conscious strategy or centralised control. Extending this logic, the framework may also apply to organisations, governments, and global social systems, where uncertainty about future paths drives collective behaviour in ways that appear coordinated. Ultimately, the causal entropic perspective reframes ignorance as predictive power. By assuming maximum uncertainty about possible futures, one can deduce the likely present choices of groups. This inversion challenges the notion that collective intelligence arises solely from information-sharing or rational adaptation. Instead, it shows that the structure of possible futures itself constrains and shapes behaviour. The entropic basis of collective behaviour thus provides a unifying lens for understanding group dynamics across scales, from animal swarms to human societies, and highlights how uncertainty, far from being a limitation, can guide prediction and explanation.

Is Language Evil?

The intuition that evil is somehow equivalent to entropy is a provocative starting point. In this framing, evil is the destruction, dissolution or degradation of things, relationships and systems into nothingness. The analogy draws on a broad understanding of entropy as the dissipation of energy and the loss of usable order or information. A rock smashed to dust, a friendship deliberately ruined, a culture erased — these can all be cast as entropy-catalysing acts. From this perspective, evil is not only physical destruction but also the corrosion of relational, informational and symbolic structures. Once the relational bonds, communicative channels or informational content are destroyed, there is only an absence — a kind of social or moral “heat death” in miniature.

This equation of evil with entropy fits partly, but imperfectly, with philosophical understandings of the term. Philosophers distinguish between a broad concept of evil — any bad state of affairs, natural or moral — and a narrow concept, reserved for the most morally despicable actions or characters. In the broad sense, both a hurricane and an act of murder could be called evil, since both bring about harm. In the narrow sense, however, the word applies to morally responsible agents and actions of extreme moral gravity, such as genocide or deliberate torture. The entropy analogy maps more comfortably onto the broad sense, where any process that increases disorder or diminishes life and complexity could be called evil. Yet the narrow sense of evil is evaluative and moral rather than descriptive, requiring intent or culpable negligence. Here, entropy-as-evil risks slipping into metaphor rather than strict definition. The difficulty becomes clearer when considering moral cases that complicate the entropy frame. Take the example of rape resulting in fertilisation. Morally, this is an evil act: it is a violation,

causing profound harm to the victim, fracturing trust and damaging relationships. Yet in purely biological terms, it increases reproductive output and could even be cast as counter-entropic at the species level. This is where the analogy falters. The moral evaluation depends on the suffering inflicted, the violation of autonomy and the corruption of human relations, not on the net change in biological complexity. Philosophical accounts emphasise that evil actions are judged within a moral framework that includes rights, dignity and intention, not only outcomes. An act can be counter-entropic in the physical or biological sense and still be evil in the moral sense, because morality does not reduce to thermodynamic accounting.

This points to a deeper distinction between natural and moral evil. Natural evils — earthquakes, diseases, entropy-driven decay — are not generally judged in moral terms unless a responsible agent could have prevented or mitigated them. Moral evils require agency and responsibility, and so the label “evil” carries a charge of condemnation that entropy, as a blind physical process, does not in itself merit. Entropy is a description of how energy and information behave; evil, in the moral sense, is an evaluation of actions and agents. The two overlap metaphorically when moral evil produces destruction and disorder, but the overlap is not complete. Extending the concept to institutions adds another layer. Claudia Card defines an institution as evil if its normal operation foreseeably produces intolerable harm without justification. Genocide qualifies because it destroys social vitality as a matter of function, not accident. In this sense, evil institutions could be described as socially entropic: they dismantle the bonds, resources and shared meanings that sustain collective life. Yet, as critics point out, calling something like marriage an evil institution because it can enable abuse stretches the definition. The mere possibility of harm is not the same as an entropic inevitability built into the structure itself. This leads to an important caution: while the metaphor of entropy can illuminate aspects of evil — particularly the destructive, disintegrative tendencies of certain actions and systems — it risks oversimplifying. Entropy in physics is value-neutral: it is neither good nor bad that heat flows from hot to cold. In some contexts, entropic processes are life-sustaining, as when energy dispersal enables ecological cycles. Similarly, not all morally good acts reduce entropy: creating a work of art may locally increase order while contributing to disorder elsewhere in the system. The moral valence depends on a web of considerations, including intent, consent, harm, and justice, not just the net movement toward or away from order.

So, is entropy evil? Not inherently. Is evil entropy? Only in part. The destruction, degradation and dispersal captured by the entropy metaphor often align with what we call evil, but the moral concept of evil is thicker: it requires an account of agency, intent, rights and the kinds of harm that matter to moral agents. Entropy may serve as a useful lens for certain aspects of evil, especially its structural and institutional forms, but it cannot replace the richer moral vocabulary needed to capture why some acts and institutions are not merely disordered, but deserving of the strongest condemnation. When human societies are bound chiefly by abstract words, codified rules, and impersonal authority rather than intimate bonds of care, they risk becoming engines of coercion and alienation. In such structures, power eclipses empathy, and individuals are subsumed into mechanisms serving order over humanity. Severed from the moral restraint of personal connection, these vast linguistic and legal edifices tend toward systemic harm—evil in their very design.

Is Evil Entropic?

In Book X of *The Republic*, Plato has Socrates propose a simple principle: anything that harms or destroys a thing is evil, while anything that preserves and benefits it is good. Each thing has its own particular good and its own particular evil; eyes have disease, grain has mildew, timber has rot, metals have rust. These evils weaken, corrupt, and ultimately destroy their object, whereas the good does not destroy, nor does the neutral. Although Plato places this exchange in the context of debating the immortality of the soul, the underlying reasoning offers a broader way to think about morality: if an act or force leads to the disintegration of what it concerns, it can be classed as evil. This line of thought invites a comparison with entropy — the physical principle that ordered systems tend toward disorder. If evil, by definition, destroys, and entropy describes the gradual undoing of structure, could the two be the same?

In moral terms, the idea that “evil is entropy” raises immediate complications. Some evils might be necessary to avert greater ones. War is often considered an evil, bringing destruction, suffering, and death. Yet in certain historical moments, such as Britain’s resistance to Nazi Germany under Churchill, war was pursued to prevent an even greater tyranny. From that perspective, the act of continuing a destructive struggle was justified, even obligatory. If evil is defined purely as destruction, such cases challenge the definition: destruction in the service of preventing worse destruction might be seen as a lesser evil, or even as good. This suggests that the moral evaluation of destruction depends not only on the fact of decay but on its context, aims, and consequences. From the standpoint of physics, entropy is a neutral process. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that in a closed system, order inevitably gives way to disorder; energy becomes more evenly distributed and less available to do work. According to the First Law, energy is never destroyed, but its capacity to produce structured effects diminishes over time. In living beings, order is maintained only through constant energy exchange with the environment. Complex organisms rely on delicately balanced systems — genetic stability, protein synthesis, cellular repair — all of which degrade over time. Telomeres shorten, errors accumulate, and regulatory processes fail. Ageing and death are biological expressions of entropy, and from a human perspective, they feel like evils because they dismantle the intricate organisation that constitutes life.

Yet physics does not recognise this as moral evil. The spread of energy is not malicious; it is simply a fundamental feature of the universe. Entropy enables change as much as it guarantees decay. Without it, the processes we value — growth, metabolism, even thought — could not occur. In Plato’s framing, the fact that entropy ultimately destroys living beings might qualify it as a kind of “natural evil”, but not a moral one, since there is no agent intending harm. The overlap between entropy and evil exists in metaphor: both can describe the unmaking of what is valuable, but only moral evil involves agency, responsibility, and the possibility of doing otherwise. This distinction also illuminates the problem of conflating moral and physical processes. If one equates all destruction with evil, then time itself becomes evil, since it brings change, decay, and death. But time and entropy also make possible the cycles of birth, renewal, and transformation. Moral reasoning must weigh not only the fact of loss but also the conditions under which loss occurs and whether it could have been prevented without greater harm. The analogy between entropy and evil is therefore suggestive but incomplete: it captures the

destructive aspect common to both, yet it cannot account for the moral dimension that makes some destruction condemnable and other destruction necessary, or even creative.

Telling Evil

Is evil linguistic by nature? Language was developed to excuse the lack of change and to keep the status quo. Is just the tool for not solving problems. Just promise to solve them and change the topic. I'm telling you a story about something that I never met, that somebody else told me that he heard from a third party and probably is just an invention. Just empty words without the wisdom of generations that. People are living at the same place for centuries and gather some knowledge about their concrete life. If you don't know something, it is much easier to lie in order to win the argument. This works better in big groups of people. These small groups you have trust between the members. No words are needed for important stuff. I trust you without a contract.

What is the nature of evil? If the evil is to treat people as objects, may be the most evil that exists among people is to create big groups of people as in empires and treat them like numbers. Having power over thousands and millions of people is evil. It's machine like action. The evil is a matter of scale. Nothing big and enormous Cannot be absolutely good. If you want to fight evil, just reduce the scale. Only then you can fix the problems. Another side of evil other than scale is media. Media detaches you from people. They become words, not even objects or animals. Using language and writing. Gives you power to easily harm people and to lose your emotional connection to them. The language keeps us far from our experience and our connection with people. In addressing the linguistic nature of evil, we delve into how language plays a critical role in shaping, expressing, and perpetuating the concept of evil. Language does not merely describe evil; it constructs and reinforces our understanding of it, mediating between individual cognition and cultural perceptions. This interaction between language and evil can be explored from several angles, emphasizing the role of linguistic structures, narratives, and metaphors in defining and communicating evil.

The Naming and Definition of Evil

Language allows us to categorize and label behaviors, events, or individuals as evil, providing a structure within which moral judgment operates. By assigning words like "evil," "wicked," or "sinister" to certain actions, humans transform subjective experiences into shared cultural norms. This labeling process shapes social consciousness, creating a sense of collective morality. The very act of naming something as "evil" sets it apart, often demonizing or dehumanizing the subject and invoking fear, disgust, or moral condemnation. Moreover, different cultures and languages may have varied definitions and nuances of evil, reflecting cultural values. For example, terms such as "sin" in a religious context might carry a weight of divine judgment, while "crime" has legal connotations of wrongdoing. Language thus becomes a tool of moral authority, deciding what is considered evil based on historical, religious, or political systems.

Metaphor and Symbolism

Metaphors are a powerful way language shapes our perception of evil. We often describe evil in terms of darkness, corruption, or disease—"dark forces," "corrupt souls," or "evil as a cancer." These metaphors are not neutral; they frame evil as something contagious, hidden, or lurking in the shadows, influencing how we respond to it. Metaphors of evil often evoke imagery that is primal, tapping into deep psychological fears. Religious and philosophical texts often rely on metaphor to depict evil in a moral and metaphysical sense. For instance, in Christian theology, Satan is often described as a serpent, a deceiver, or a prince of darkness, invoking a symbolic language that informs centuries of Western thought about evil. These linguistic symbols shape not only religious belief but also broader cultural attitudes towards evil and morality.

The Role of Narrative

Evil is frequently conveyed through stories, myths, and narratives that give structure to moral lessons. Narratives about evil—whether in literature, religious texts, or historical accounts—provide a framework for understanding human behavior and the consequences of moral transgression. In these narratives, language plays a pivotal role in delineating the hero and the villain, good and evil, reinforcing binary oppositions that simplify complex moral realities. For example, literary works like *Paradise Lost* by John Milton offer complex portrayals of evil, where the character of Satan becomes a linguistic vehicle for exploring themes of rebellion, pride, and fallibility. These narratives are laden with moral and linguistic dualities that shape how cultures interpret the nature of evil, often creating archetypes of "the fallen" or "the outcast" that resonate through time.

Propaganda and the Linguistic Justification of Evil

One of the more sinister aspects of language's role in evil is its use in propaganda and rhetoric to justify or obscure morally reprehensible actions. Euphemisms and manipulative language can be employed to reframe evil acts as necessary or even virtuous. In war, for instance, language such as "collateral damage" masks the reality of civilian casualties, and phrases like "final solution" can hide the true nature of genocide. Through carefully constructed language, perpetrators of evil can distort truth, making atrocities seem justifiable or inevitable. George Orwell famously explored this concept in 1984, showing how language—through mechanisms like Newspeak—can be manipulated to control thought and justify totalitarian evil.

Language and Dehumanization

One of the most potent ways language facilitates evil is through dehumanization. By stripping individuals or groups of their humanity through derogatory terms or slurs, language creates a psychological distance that allows for cruelty and violence. Dehumanizing language reduces people to objects or animals, enabling their mistreatment without triggering the natural empathetic response that one might have toward a fellow human being. This process has been evident in genocides, colonialism, and systemic oppression throughout history. In the context of war or slavery, people have been referred to as "vermin," "savages," or "property," linguistically transforming them into entities unworthy of moral consideration. This linguistic shift lowers moral inhibitions against committing acts of evil, as it removes the emotional and ethical barriers to cruelty.

The Ambiguity of Evil in Language

Language also reveals the ambiguity and complexity of evil. Terms like "evil" can be highly subjective, depending on context, perspective, or cultural background. What one group may consider evil, another might see as justified resistance or moral righteousness. The malleability of language allows evil to be constructed differently across societies, making it a contested and fluid concept. Thus, language can both clarify and obscure the nature of evil, depending on how it is used and by whom.

Conclusion

The linguistic nature of evil highlights how language is not just a passive tool but an active force in constructing, interpreting, and perpetuating evil. Through labels, metaphors, narratives, and propaganda, language shapes our moral universe, providing the framework within which individuals and societies define and respond to evil. Understanding this linguistic dimension is crucial to recognizing how language can both reflect and drive moral action, for better or worse.

Manufacturing Evil

The idea that language is purposefully "manufacturing evil" through literature of transgression, myths, and tales of monsters is a complex one. While it might seem like language creates or amplifies ideas of evil, the relationship between language, storytelling, and the concept of evil is more nuanced.

Language as a Mirror of Human Fears

In many ways, language doesn't necessarily manufacture evil but gives form to deep-seated human fears, anxieties, and moral dilemmas. Myths and stories about monsters or transgressive acts often serve to reflect human experiences, including the darker aspects of existence—death, violence, chaos, and the unknown. By giving names and shapes to these fears (monsters, devils, demons), language allows us to confront and understand them. In this sense, rather than creating evil, language acts as a tool for exploring it.

The Role of Myths and Scary Tales

Scary tales and myths about monsters, demons, and other evil forces have historically served social and moral purposes. They often function as cautionary tales, teaching lessons about societal norms, boundaries, and the consequences of violating them. Monsters embody the "other," representing what is feared or considered taboo. These stories give shape to the chaotic and the dangerous, sometimes exaggerating and distorting those fears to help people navigate complex emotions. However, this doesn't mean language creates evil—it provides a framework to discuss and control our understanding of it.

Transgressive Literature

Literature of transgression often challenges societal norms, breaking taboos and delving into dark or "evil" aspects of human nature. But rather than being a deliberate effort to "manufacture evil," such literature often seeks to question, probe, and unsettle the boundaries between good and evil. Works in this genre, such as those by authors like Georges Bataille or Marquis de

Sade, test the limits of what can be said or thought. In doing so, they expose the complexities and contradictions of morality, desire, and power.

The Power of Language

Language has immense power to shape perception, but it also reflects the structures of the societies that use it. When language describes evil—whether through monsters or acts of transgression—it is often doing so as a reflection of human psychology, societal fears, and moral frameworks. In some cases, the use of language to describe evil can manipulate or exaggerate fears (for political or ideological purposes), but this doesn't mean language itself "manufactures" evil. Instead, it amplifies or distorts existing fears.

Evil as a Cultural Construct

The concept of evil is deeply rooted in culture, religion, and philosophy. What one society or culture sees as evil may be seen as necessary or even good in another context. Language, then, is a tool through which these constructs are communicated and reinforced. In creating monsters or transgressive figures in stories, cultures articulate their boundaries and values, often externalizing what they fear most. But these creations are more about maintaining order and understanding the human condition than generating evil.

In conclusion, language doesn't manufacture evil in a purposeful sense. Instead, it gives shape and form to ideas about evil, fear, and transgression. Literature of transgression and old myths with monsters serve to externalize and explore human fears, desires, and moral complexities. Language is a medium through which these ideas are negotiated, shaped by cultural and psychological forces rather than an inherent force of evil creation.

The Use of Evil

The concept of evil has been central to human thought, culture, and morality for millennia, and its purpose for humans can be understood in a number of ways, depending on philosophical, religious, psychological, and cultural perspectives. Here are several purposes or roles that "evil" serves for humans:

Moral and Ethical Framework

Evil provides a necessary counterpoint to good, helping humans define moral boundaries and ethical systems. By understanding what is evil, we clarify what is good, righteous, or virtuous. The existence of evil allows for a dichotomy that helps people navigate complex moral choices. For example, notions of evil often guide societal laws, taboos, and norms, encouraging behaviors that are considered beneficial for the survival and well-being of the community, while discouraging actions that are harmful. In this way, evil is a conceptual tool that helps individuals and societies articulate values, responsibilities, and justice. It provides a basis for moral judgment, allowing societies to define what behaviors, ideologies, or actions are unacceptable.

Exploring the Human Condition

Evil is often used as a lens through which humans explore the darker aspects of the human condition. It allows us to investigate human nature, including aspects like aggression, fear,

cruelty, selfishness, and power struggles. Literature, art, and mythology have long used evil characters, demons, and monsters to represent these darker impulses. By confronting evil, we grapple with the complexities of human psychology and morality. The stories of good versus evil are often narratives about overcoming internal or external challenges, exploring our capacity for destruction as well as redemption. Understanding or confronting evil allows individuals and societies to reflect on human frailty, suffering, and the nature of existence itself.

Symbolism of Chaos and Disorder

Evil frequently symbolizes chaos, disorder, and the unknown. In myths, religions, and folklore, evil forces often represent the untamed or uncontrolled aspects of the world—whether in nature or human society. For early humans, these representations might have been a way to conceptualize dangerous forces like natural disasters, illness, or violence. In modern contexts, evil can symbolize anything that threatens the social or moral order—such as crime, oppression, or corruption. By personifying these forces as "evil," we create a way to manage fear, construct order, and impose meaning on an unpredictable world.

Psychological Projection and Othering

Evil serves as a means of externalizing fears, weaknesses, or unacceptable desires. Throughout history, humans have often "othered" people or groups, labeling them as evil to justify war, persecution, or exclusion. This allows individuals or societies to project their own darker impulses onto external enemies. By identifying evil in others, people avoid facing the uncomfortable aspects of their own nature or behavior. On a psychological level, the concept of evil also allows for a form of catharsis. By confronting "evil" characters in stories or nightmares, humans can explore their deepest fears in a controlled way. It gives shape to what might otherwise be an abstract or overwhelming anxiety.

Religious and Spiritual Understanding

In many religious traditions, evil serves a spiritual purpose by providing a moral test or challenge. The presence of evil forces, such as Satan in Christianity or Mara in Buddhism, introduces the possibility of temptation, sin, or suffering, through which individuals are tested and refined. In this sense, evil often plays a crucial role in spiritual narratives of growth, redemption, and salvation. In some religious views, evil is part of a cosmic dualism where good and evil forces are locked in perpetual conflict, and humans must choose sides or navigate between them. This struggle gives life meaning, as overcoming or resisting evil leads to spiritual progress or divine favor.

Evolutionary and Social Function

From an evolutionary perspective, the concept of evil may have served to reinforce social cohesion and survival. Labeling certain behaviors as "evil" or harmful helped early human societies regulate dangerous actions like murder, theft, or betrayal. By collectively agreeing on what is evil, communities could protect themselves from internal threats and ensure group survival. Evil also has a narrative function in terms of social cohesion. By uniting against a common evil—whether in the form of a rival group, dangerous animals, or even natural disasters—societies can create strong bonds, a shared sense of purpose, and collective identity. Conflict against evil often serves as a unifying force in human history.

A Pathway to Redemption and Growth

Evil often serves as a means of transformation, either personal or collective. In stories, encountering or confronting evil forces a character to grow, learn, and evolve. Evil is the obstacle that must be overcome, and in that struggle, people can attain greater self-awareness, wisdom, or redemption. Similarly, collective experiences of evil—such as wars or political oppression—can force societies to reflect on their values and ethics. The presence of evil provides an opportunity for learning, growth, and ultimately, the possibility of transcending the very structures or behaviors that allowed evil to flourish in the first place.

Evil as an Existential Question

Finally, evil plays a crucial role in existential philosophy. Thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre grappled with the problem of evil in a world without inherent meaning. For many, the existence of evil challenges the idea of a just or benevolent universe, raising deep philosophical questions about the nature of life, suffering, and human freedom. For existentialists, the confrontation with evil is an essential part of creating meaning in a seemingly indifferent or chaotic world. By facing the reality of suffering and malevolence, individuals are forced to make ethical choices and take responsibility for their actions in a world that may not provide clear moral guidance.

In conclusion, the purpose of evil for humans is multifaceted. It serves as a boundary for moral systems, a way to explore human psychology, a symbol of chaos and disorder, a method of societal cohesion, and a profound existential question. It can act as a mirror, reflecting back both the worst and most heroic aspects of human nature. Evil gives life complexity, and in confronting or overcoming it, humans find meaning, growth, and, perhaps, redemption.

Rationalization as Excuse

Yes, in many ways, language can act as a form of justification or rationalization for the monstrous things humans do, providing a means to distance ourselves from the moral weight of certain actions. Language gives us the tools to categorize, explain, and sometimes excuse actions that might otherwise be unacceptable. This is especially true when we use euphemisms, justifications, or abstract terms to describe acts of violence, cruelty, or oppression.

Euphemisms and Softening Language

Language often masks the brutality of certain acts by using softer or more abstract terms. For example, terms like "collateral damage" instead of civilian casualties, or "enhanced interrogation techniques" instead of torture, serve to diminish the impact of the actions they describe. By using such language, people can distance themselves from the emotional or ethical consequences of their actions, making it easier to accept or even justify morally dubious behaviors.

Dehumanization and Objectification

One of the most powerful ways language is used to excuse evil is through the dehumanization of others. By labeling groups of people as "monsters," "vermin," or "subhuman," language strips them of their humanity, making it easier to commit violence against them without guilt or moral conflict. Historically, dehumanizing language has been a key tool in justifying acts like genocide, slavery, and war. When language reduces individuals or groups to objects, it allows those committing harm to see their victims as less deserving of empathy or moral consideration. This linguistic manipulation is a form of moral disengagement, creating a psychological distance between the perpetrator and the victim.

Rationalization and Justification

Language is frequently used to rationalize or justify evil actions. Terms like "self-defense," "necessity," "greater good," or "preemptive strike" are often invoked to explain away violent or harmful acts. These justifications create a narrative where the evil act is framed as unavoidable or even morally correct in certain circumstances. This rationalization is a way of alleviating guilt or moral responsibility. It reframes the perpetrator as acting out of duty, survival, or in pursuit of a higher cause, making it easier to excuse actions that would otherwise be seen as immoral or unjust.

Abstracting Violence

When acts of violence or evil are abstracted through technical or bureaucratic language, they become easier to commit. For example, referring to mass killings as "population control" or "ethnic cleansing" abstracts the act, making it seem more like a policy or strategic decision than a deeply immoral act. Bureaucracies often use such language to sanitize the horrific realities of what is being done, shielding those responsible from fully confronting the human consequences. This is also true in contexts of war, where killing can be described in terms of strategy or tactics, distancing the individual soldier or commander from the personal responsibility of taking lives. The abstraction makes it easier to commit atrocities without fully acknowledging their moral weight.

Moral Codes and Cultural Justifications

Every culture has a moral code that defines good and evil, but these codes are flexible and often culturally specific. Acts considered monstrous in one context may be seen as heroic in another, depending on how language frames them. For instance, what one group calls "terrorism," another may call "freedom fighting." This linguistic flexibility allows people to frame even the most heinous acts as morally justified depending on their cultural or political perspective. In literature of transgression, we often see characters who use language to justify their evil actions, sometimes viewing them as necessary challenges to societal norms. The anti-heroes of such works often articulate complex, philosophical reasons for their transgressions, using language to navigate the boundaries between good and evil. By doing so, they complicate our understanding of morality, showing how language can blur these lines.

Catharsis and Deflection

As you pointed out, if evil can serve as a form of catharsis, language becomes a tool for deflecting responsibility for these actions. Catharsis, especially in literature or storytelling, allows individuals or societies to process difficult emotions—fear, anger, desire for revenge—

through a controlled narrative. In doing so, they may feel that these dark impulses are "worked through" or "purged" without having to confront the full moral implications of their behavior. Through language, societies can construct myths, legends, and stories where evil acts are performed by others—villains, monsters, or outsiders. This distancing allows people to engage with the concept of evil indirectly, while language provides a buffer between the self and the moral consequences of those acts. In real life, this can translate into rationalizing our own wrongdoings by comparing them to greater evils or shifting the blame onto external forces.

Religious or Ideological Justification

Religions and ideologies often use language to justify acts of evil by embedding them within larger frameworks of morality or divine purpose. In many cases, atrocities are committed with the belief that they are sanctioned or commanded by a higher power. Phrases like "holy war" or "divine punishment" have been used throughout history to justify actions that would otherwise be considered evil, framing them as necessary for a greater spiritual or ideological good. This type of justification allows people to believe they are acting in accordance with a moral or divine law, even when their actions cause harm. The language of religion or ideology transforms evil into something sacred or righteous, making it easier to excuse.

Self-Deception

Finally, language enables self-deception, allowing individuals to convince themselves that their actions are justified or not as harmful as they might seem. Through the manipulation of words, people can rewrite their own narratives, absolving themselves of guilt or responsibility. Terms like "mistakes were made" or "I was following orders" distance the self from the full weight of their actions. In these cases, language is not only a tool for external justification but also for internal reconciliation with one's own moral failings.

Conclusion: Language as a Double-Edged Sword

Language is indeed a double-edged sword when it comes to evil. On one hand, it gives humans the capacity to articulate and understand evil, providing a way to explore and confront it. On the other hand, it offers a means of excusing, justifying, or softening the impact of evil acts, allowing individuals and societies to distance themselves from the moral consequences of their behavior. The human capacity for self-justification through language is vast, and in many cases, it can serve to perpetuate cycles of harm and violence. The words we choose can frame evil in ways that make it seem permissible, necessary, or even virtuous, depending on the context and the audience. While language doesn't create evil, it certainly shapes how we understand, engage with, and sometimes excuse it.

Everything is Permitted

Slavoy Žižek's paraphrasing of Dostoevsky's famous quote ("If there is no God, everything is permitted") into "If there is God, then everything is permitted" shifts the focus to a critique of how belief in an authority—whether divine, ideological, or moral—can justify actions that might otherwise be considered immoral or evil. In this view, the existence of God (or any

ultimate authority) does not inherently limit human behavior but can, paradoxically, enable the justification of any behavior by appealing to that authority.

The Power of Language and Rhetoric to Justify Actions

If we take this idea further, as you suggest, the mastery of rhetoric and language does indeed give individuals or groups the ability to permit themselves almost anything, provided they can construct a convincing narrative. By "inventing new gods" or systems of belief, and publicly claiming allegiance to them, people can excuse or justify their actions in the name of those gods or ideologies. This dynamic has been seen throughout history, where religious, political, or ideological rhetoric has been used to justify atrocities, exploitation, or domination.

The Creation of Ideological Justifications

Throughout history, people have often invented new gods, ideologies, or moral frameworks to legitimize their actions. Whether in the name of religion, political ideology, or abstract concepts like "freedom," "justice," or "progress," language is used to construct systems of belief that grant moral permission for otherwise questionable actions.

Religious Wars: People have long invoked divine sanction to wage war, conquer territories, or oppress others, claiming that their actions are justified by a higher power. The Crusades, for example, were fought with the belief that God sanctioned the violence.

Political Ideologies: Totalitarian regimes often justify their atrocities by appealing to an ideological "god," like the purity of the nation, the revolution, or the will of the people. Leaders and elites can manipulate language to align any action—no matter how monstrous—with their constructed narrative.

By rhetorically aligning oneself with a powerful concept or "god," it becomes easier to justify and rationalize actions that would otherwise be condemned. This echoes the Žižekian notion that belief in an ultimate authority allows for the permissibility of everything.

Moral Relativism and Invented Authorities

If language allows for the invention of new "gods" or moral systems, this can lead to a kind of moral relativism, where different groups or individuals claim the right to define their own ethics. By presenting an authority or belief system as absolute, they can permit themselves almost any action, using that authority as moral cover.

Political Propaganda: Dictators or authoritarian leaders often position themselves as divinely or historically chosen figures, creating the rhetorical conditions in which their actions are above reproach. By establishing themselves as embodying the "will of the people" or the "spirit of history," they can do anything under the guise of fulfilling that higher purpose.

Corporate Justifications: Corporations often create narratives that justify environmentally or socially destructive behavior by appealing to the "god" of economic growth or market competition. Rhetoric about job creation, progress, or national interest can be used to deflect attention from the harm they cause.

In both cases, language is manipulated to grant permission for acts that may otherwise be viewed as unethical. By claiming alignment with some invented or constructed authority, the individuals or institutions involved absolve themselves of responsibility.

The Flexibility of Belief Systems

One of the most powerful features of language is its flexibility. The ability to redefine and reinterpret belief systems allows people to continually adapt their justifications for their actions. This adaptability is what allows new gods to be "invented," as well as old gods to be repurposed to fit contemporary needs.

In this sense, the process is not only about inventing entirely new gods or belief systems but also about reinterpreting or repurposing existing ones to fit contemporary needs. This flexibility in language and belief allows for the manipulation of moral and ethical boundaries in ways that suit the interests of those in power or those seeking to justify their actions.

Repurposing Existing Beliefs for New Justifications

Throughout history, existing religious, political, or ideological systems have been reinterpreted to justify various actions. For example:

Religious Interpretations: Throughout history, religious texts have been reinterpreted to support war, oppression, or social hierarchies, even when the original teachings might not align with such actions. In this way, religious language can be manipulated to permit actions that would otherwise seem at odds with the original beliefs.

Legal and Political Systems: Constitutions, laws, and political doctrines are often reinterpreted to justify power grabs, inequality, or unethical practices. By claiming that the law or constitution "permits" or even "mandates" certain actions, leaders can bend the rules to suit their desires.

Language, in this case, serves as the tool that makes this possible. Through rhetorical mastery, individuals can argue that their actions are not just acceptable but necessary, even when those actions would have previously been seen as immoral or unacceptable.

Public Acceptance and the Power of Persuasion

When someone publicly claims belief in a "new god" or system of justification, they also rely on the power of persuasion to gain legitimacy. Language plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and convincing people that the invented or reinterpreted gods or ideologies are real and valid. If the rhetoric is convincing enough, it can lead to widespread acceptance of actions that would otherwise be questioned.

Nationalism and Leaders as "Gods": Some political leaders create a cult of personality around themselves, portraying their will or vision as sacred or unchallengeable. Through persuasive language, they convince the public that following their leadership is morally correct, even if their policies are harmful or oppressive.

Cultural and Ideological Movements: Cultural and ideological movements often use language to define new moral frameworks, granting themselves moral permission to pursue their goals, even if it means transgressing traditional ethical boundaries. They create a new moral narrative,

complete with heroes, villains, and permissible actions, which helps justify any extreme actions taken in the name of that cause.

The Danger of Mastering Language to Justify Everything

If mastery of rhetoric and language allows us to permit anything, as Žižek suggests in his paraphrase, there is a danger of falling into a world where moral boundaries are constantly shifting, and nothing is truly sacred or off-limits. The ability to justify anything by invoking new "gods" or beliefs can lead to a breakdown of collective moral responsibility.

Moral Anarchy: If every action can be justified through clever rhetoric, societies may lose their shared sense of morality. This could lead to a world where power determines what is right and wrong, rather than any stable moral or ethical code.

Manipulation and Corruption: Those who are skilled in rhetoric and persuasion could manipulate language to serve their own interests, while the broader population is misled into believing that certain actions are morally acceptable, even when they are not. This leads to a corrosion of truth and ethics, where actions are excused not because they are right, but because they are rhetorically justified.

Conclusion: The Power and Perils of Language in Justifying Actions

Ultimately, the ability to use language to invent new gods or belief systems and justify any action is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it allows for flexibility in how we understand and respond to moral dilemmas. On the other hand, it opens the door to moral relativism, where language becomes a tool not for truth or justice, but for excusing actions that would otherwise be indefensible. In a world where language can be manipulated to permit anything, we must remain vigilant about the ways in which rhetoric is used to justify actions. Whether through the creation of new belief systems or the reinterpretation of existing ones, the ethical implications of such justifications must be critically examined to prevent the erosion of moral responsibility.

Calculus of Dissent

James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in *The Calculus of Dissent: Language Decay and the Breakdown of Constitutional Democracy* provide a framework for understanding how the stability of democratic systems depends not only on institutional design or economic rationality but on the durability of language itself. The starting point is the individual, whose ability to participate in collective decision-making depends upon the capacity to articulate preferences, interests, and disagreements in a shared linguistic space. When language begins to erode, this capacity weakens. Individuals no longer possess the conceptual clarity required to express complex political or economic claims. What emerges first is not open rebellion but a subtle and growing dissatisfaction. The early seeds of dissent appear in the silent frustration of citizens who sense that something is wrong but lack the linguistic precision necessary to explain it. The decline of expressive capacity creates a gap between thought and articulation, and within that gap miscommunication accumulates. Dissent is therefore manufactured gradually, not through ideological confrontation but through the slow deterioration of the language that once allowed individuals to present their interests clearly within the political system.

The analysis then shifts from the individual to the structure of political institutions. Democratic systems depend on the idea of consent, yet consent requires understanding. If language loses its ability to convey complexity, the very concept of consent becomes unstable. Laws, rights, and economic regulations are written in language that presupposes interpretive competence among citizens. When linguistic competence declines, citizens confront institutions whose procedures and meanings become opaque. Political language begins to appear distant, technocratic, or incomprehensible. As a result, trust in democratic institutions weakens. What Buchanan and Tullock originally described as the rational foundation of constitutional democracy becomes undermined when communication fails. In advanced societies, where political systems rely heavily on abstract and technical language, the erosion of linguistic competence intensifies alienation. Citizens no longer feel capable of engaging meaningfully with political processes. The calculus of dissent begins to emerge not because individuals reject democracy but because they cannot understand the language through which democratic authority is exercised. This linguistic deterioration also affects the costs of collective decision-making. In classical political economy, decision-making is associated with transaction costs, negotiation, and compromise. However, these processes presuppose effective communication. When language weakens, the effort required to reach agreement increases dramatically. Misinterpretations multiply, negotiations stall, and policy discussions become increasingly inefficient. Communication itself becomes an obstacle rather than a tool of coordination. The result is an exponential rise in the costs of decision-making. Citizens struggle to interpret proposals, policymakers struggle to explain them, and consensus becomes difficult to achieve. In such conditions dissent spreads not because citizens fundamentally oppose one another but because they cannot articulate shared solutions. The failure of communication creates the appearance of ideological conflict where none originally existed. Decision-making slows, institutions become paralysed, and the perception of systemic failure intensifies. Majority rule, which Buchanan and Tullock considered a stabilising principle of democratic governance, also depends upon a common linguistic framework. For a majority to function coherently, its members must share not only preferences but a language capable of expressing those preferences in recognisable forms. When language fragments, majorities lose their internal coherence. Groups that once appeared unified begin to fracture as different interpretations of political concepts emerge. Words such as justice, equality, freedom, or responsibility begin to carry incompatible meanings across different segments of society. The majority no longer speaks with a single voice because the linguistic medium that once sustained that unity has disintegrated. In complex industrial societies, where policy coordination requires precise communication across multiple domains, linguistic fragmentation produces ideological fragmentation. The calculus of dissent accelerates as groups discover that they cannot even agree on the meaning of the terms through which their preferences are expressed.

The problem becomes even more acute among marginalised groups. Minority rights depend heavily on the capacity of these groups to communicate their grievances and demands in terms that the broader society can recognise and address. When language deteriorates, marginalised communities face a double barrier. On the one hand, the majority struggles to articulate coherent policies; on the other hand, minorities struggle to express their needs effectively. Misunderstandings multiply and grievances accumulate. Dissent becomes structural because the channels of communication through which negotiation and compromise might occur have

weakened. Marginalised groups experience disenfranchisement not solely because of direct oppression but because their voices cannot travel effectively through a fragmented linguistic environment. The inability to bridge communicative divides deepens social tension and reinforces perceptions of injustice across the political landscape. The constitutional framework itself is also affected by the erosion of language. Constitutions are not merely collections of rules but complex linguistic constructions designed to regulate collective action. Their stability depends upon the continued intelligibility of the language in which they are written. When linguistic competence declines, constitutional interpretation becomes increasingly contested. Legal language appears ambiguous or inaccessible, and disputes over meaning intensify. In this context dissent arises not only from ideological disagreement but from interpretive uncertainty. Citizens and institutions begin to disagree about what constitutional principles actually require. As legal interpretation becomes unstable, the shared consensus that once sustained constitutional authority begins to collapse. The constitution loses its role as a stable framework for cooperation and becomes instead a site of ongoing dispute. Economic life also suffers from linguistic decline. Buchanan and Tullock originally analysed external costs as consequences imposed upon individuals by collective decisions. In a linguistic perspective, the deterioration of language itself becomes a form of external cost. When communication systems weaken, misunderstandings generate inefficiencies throughout the economy. Economic actors struggle to convey expectations, negotiate contracts, or coordinate actions effectively. Misinterpretations lead to disputes and misaligned incentives. The costs of misunderstanding accumulate across markets and institutions. The calculus of dissent expands as different groups attempt to manage the consequences of decisions whose implications they cannot fully articulate or understand. Language once allowed economic actors to specify consequences with precision. When that precision disappears, economic decisions become increasingly vulnerable to confusion and conflict.

Economic coordination, which often relies on bargaining and compromise, also depends on linguistic clarity. Political processes such as negotiation and trade-offs require a shared vocabulary through which competing interests can be reconciled. When language deteriorates, the ability to communicate such compromises weakens. Economic bargains become difficult to explain, and the rationale behind policy choices becomes obscure to the public. Citizens begin to suspect manipulation or injustice because they cannot clearly follow the logic of economic decisions. Disagreements multiply not necessarily because outcomes are unfair but because they cannot be adequately communicated. The breakdown of economic coordination thus reflects a deeper communicative breakdown. The inability to articulate complex economic trade-offs generates further dissatisfaction with political and economic institutions. The long-term consequence of linguistic deterioration is the collapse of economic and ideological consensus. Modern economies depend heavily on communication systems capable of coordinating large numbers of actors across complex networks of production and exchange. When language weakens, this coordination becomes increasingly difficult. Policy debates become chaotic, economic expectations diverge, and institutions struggle to maintain stability. Ideological consensus disintegrates as shared frameworks of interpretation disappear. Citizens begin to perceive the economic system as arbitrary or dysfunctional. In such conditions dissent becomes widespread because the language necessary to explain economic processes has lost its

coherence. Even highly developed economies become vulnerable when the linguistic foundations supporting legal and economic coordination begin to crumble.

The final question concerns the future of democratic governance under conditions of linguistic decay. Constitutional democracies depend fundamentally on the capacity of citizens to communicate, deliberate, and interpret political language collectively. When language itself becomes unstable, these processes weaken. Miscommunication becomes routine, ideological fragmentation intensifies, and political debate loses coherence. Democratic institutions struggle to maintain legitimacy because citizens can no longer understand the language through which authority is exercised. The calculus of dissent therefore becomes the dominant condition of political life. In a society where communication no longer supports shared understanding, dissent ceases to be an occasional feature of democratic disagreement and becomes the default state of political existence. The primacy of language over economics emerges as the central lesson of this reinterpretation. Economic systems and political institutions cannot function independently of the linguistic structures that sustain them. Language provides the medium through which laws are interpreted, policies are explained, and collective decisions are negotiated. When that medium deteriorates, misunderstandings proliferate and ideological fragmentation spreads. Even the most sophisticated economies cannot maintain stability if the language through which their rules and expectations are communicated loses its clarity. The calculus of dissent therefore reveals a deeper truth: communication precedes coordination, and without a coherent linguistic framework the structures of democracy and economy alike begin to disintegrate.

Battle Between Good and Evil

Andrew Bard Schmookler in ‘How Civilization Inevitably Gives Rise to a “Battle Between Good and Evil”’(2022) argues that the structure of human civilisation generates a persistent conflict between constructive and destructive tendencies within the human world. According to this interpretation, civilisation produces conditions in which a coherent destructive dynamic gradually emerges. This dynamic, described as a force of evil, operates through patterns of brokenness that repeatedly manifest across human history. War, greed, cruelty and injustice do not appear as isolated phenomena but as interconnected processes that reinforce one another. Each destructive element strengthens the next, creating a cycle in which social disorder reproduces itself across generations. Civilisation therefore contains within its structure the mechanisms that allow these patterns of brokenness to spread and intensify. The emergence of this destructive force is traced to the moment when human beings began shaping societies through cultural invention rather than remaining within the constraints of natural evolutionary order. Once human communities developed the capacity to design their own social systems, they entered a new historical condition in which the rules governing survival were no longer regulated by the balance of nature. In this new setting the interaction between societies produced a situation resembling what Thomas Hobbes famously described as a war of all against all. In such an environment power becomes the decisive factor in determining which forms of social organisation prevail. Those cultural patterns that maximise power gain an advantage over those that prioritise harmony or mutual flourishing. As a consequence, traits associated with domination, coercion and aggression acquire evolutionary advantages within

the social arena. Schmookler characterises this dynamic through the image of the spirit of the warlord or the spirit of the gangster, a pattern of behaviour that spreads because it proves effective in an environment governed by competition for power. Once this pattern establishes itself, it reproduces across societies and institutions, gradually embedding the logic of power maximisation within the fabric of civilisation.

Alongside this destructive tendency there also exists a countervailing orientation that can be understood as a force of good. Human beings possess a system of values shaped by biological evolution that inclines them toward behaviours supportive of life. These values favour cooperation, empathy, justice and the pursuit of peace. They represent the impulse toward wholeness rather than brokenness. Yet the social conditions created by civilisation often undermine these life-serving tendencies. In an environment dominated by competition for power, the values that sustain human well-being struggle to prevail. The conflict between the force that produces brokenness and the force that seeks wholeness becomes one of the defining tensions of civilisation. The struggle between good and evil therefore appears not merely as a religious or philosophical idea but as a structural feature of social evolution. The direction of civilisation depends upon which of these opposing tendencies gains the upper hand. If societies manage to strengthen the life-serving orientation that fosters justice, peace and mutual care, the destructive consequences of power competition may be restrained. If, however, the dynamics of domination continue to shape the evolution of social systems, the patterns of brokenness that have characterised much of history will persist and intensify.

This interpretation also challenges the common assumption that the darker features of history reflect the inherent nature of human beings. Schmookler argues that the violence, cruelty and injustice visible in the historical record should not be understood as expressions of human nature itself. Rather, these phenomena arise from the structural conditions created by civilisation. When societies departed from the ecological equilibrium shaped by biological evolution and began constructing their own cultural orders, they entered an arena in which natural regulatory mechanisms no longer governed behaviour. Civilisation thus introduced a form of anarchy into human existence. In this anarchic environment societies interact without an overarching authority capable of regulating competition for power. The struggle for dominance becomes the central organising principle of social interaction. Groups and institutions adopt behaviours that enhance their power because survival within the system depends upon such strategies. Cultural patterns that maximise power spread from one society to another through processes of imitation, conquest or competition. Over time these power-maximising behaviours contaminate the broader civilisation, producing the historical ugliness associated with warfare, oppression and injustice. What appears to be the moral failure of humanity is therefore more accurately interpreted as the consequence of the conditions created by civilisation itself. Although this dynamic has shaped human history for millennia, Schmookler does not treat it as an unchangeable destiny. As civilisations expand and develop more complex forms of organisation, new possibilities arise for collective reflection and deliberate decision-making. Human societies possess the capacity to recognise the destructive patterns that have governed their evolution and to construct alternative arrangements that prioritise life-serving values. The development of institutions capable of coordinating cooperation on a larger scale could gradually replace the anarchic competition that has dominated social evolution. By designing systems of governance oriented toward justice and

shared well-being, humanity might eventually escape the cycle through which the spirit of domination spreads from one society to another. The recognition of the forces shaping civilisation therefore opens the possibility of transforming them. The question of transformation becomes particularly urgent when considering the future of civilisation. Schmookler emphasises that modern humanity stands at a critical moment in its historical development. The power accumulated by civilisation during the last century has created dangers unprecedented in human history. Two threats stand out above all others: the possibility of catastrophic nuclear war and the accelerating degradation of the natural environment. Technological power has expanded far more rapidly than the institutional and moral frameworks required to manage it responsibly. Humanity has entered an era in which the consequences of collective action can threaten the survival of civilisation itself. The patterns of conflict and environmental exploitation that characterised earlier historical periods can no longer be treated as manageable risks. The destructive capacities now available to human societies have reached a level at which even a single failure of political judgment could produce irreversible catastrophe.

For centuries humanity survived by muddling through crises as they arose, relying on gradual adjustments and partial solutions. Schmookler argues that this strategy is no longer sufficient. The scale of modern technological power requires a far more deliberate effort to organise civilisation in ways that prevent self-destruction. The central challenge confronting humanity is therefore the task of ordering civilisation well enough to ensure its survival. This challenge has existed since the beginning of civilisation, when human societies first stepped beyond the ecological structures that once regulated their behaviour. From that moment onward, civilisation became an experiment in social self-organisation conducted without the stabilising mechanisms provided by nature. The continuing presence of conflict and disorder reflects the difficulty of achieving such organisation on a global scale. To illustrate the significance of this challenge, Schmookler proposes a thought experiment involving a cosmic historian examining the fate of different civilisations across the universe. From this perspective the survival of a civilisation depends upon its capacity to recognise the dangers created by its own power and to respond with sufficient foresight. Civilisations that fail to address the destructive forces generated by their development eventually collapse under the weight of their own capabilities. Those that succeed are able to create systems of cooperation that prevent power from turning against the civilisation that produced it. The survival of humanity therefore depends upon the ability to understand the forces shaping its history and to design institutions capable of guiding civilisation toward more constructive paths. Central to this understanding is the recognition that a destructive force has accompanied civilisation since its origin. This force operates independently of human nature, shaping social evolution through the relentless competition for power among societies. By identifying the mechanisms through which this force operates, humanity may develop strategies capable of counteracting it. Understanding the problem is the first step toward overcoming it.

Schmookler develops these ideas further in 'The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution'. In this work he examines the historical development of civilisation as a process driven by competition among societies rather than by deliberate collective choice. The book challenges the conventional narrative that civilisation represents a voluntary path toward progress. Instead it suggests that once societies entered the civilised condition they found themselves locked into a system governed by power. Human communities became the first

species capable of inventing their own social arrangements, yet this freedom produced an environment of unprecedented instability. Without the balancing forces present in natural ecosystems, societies competed with one another in ways that favoured those capable of accumulating and exercising greater power. Cultural forms that proved effective in this struggle spread and displaced those less suited to the demands of competition. The result was a form of social evolution driven not by the pursuit of human flourishing but by the relentless selection of power-maximising behaviours. This process explains why civilisation, despite its achievements, has repeatedly produced systems marked by domination, alienation and destruction. The evolution of civilisation has therefore been shaped less by the deliberate intentions of humanity than by the structural pressures generated by competition for power among societies.

Conclusion: Civilisation As A Mental Disease

Laws of Media

In the McLuhans "Laws of Media," the idea that language, along with other tools and technologies, acts as an extension of humans is explored in depth. Sir Karl Popper's assertion that a scientific law must be capable of falsification leads to the notion that all human artifacts—whether language, tools, laws, or computers—are extensions of the human body or mind. This idea holds profound implications when viewed through the lens of thinkers like Konrad Lorenz, who warns that humans, in their capacity to create tools, cannot fully trust themselves. These tools, including language, can easily become weapons used to harm one another. As humans developed these extensions, from physical tools to the abstraction of language, they began altering their interactions with the world and with each other. Language, like a weapon, can be wielded from a distance, enabling manipulation, control, and harm without the immediate emotional impact of direct confrontation. Lorenz argues that if humans had natural weapons like tusks or horns, they would have evolved stronger inhibitions against harming members of their own species. However, with artificial weapons—including language—humans face fewer psychological barriers to destruction, whether physical or emotional. Just as physical weapons allow for remote harm, language as an extension of the mind allows for remote manipulation and violence. When people engage in verbal aggression or ideological conflict, they often fail to grasp the full emotional or moral consequences of their actions, much like a pilot dropping bombs from an airplane experiences a detachment from the destruction below.

This detachment is a product of the very tools humans create to extend their capabilities. The changes these tools bring about in human identity and societal structures are deep and often go unnoticed. In the same way that firearms and bombs distance their users from the physical act of killing, language and media can distance individuals from the emotional and ethical consequences of their words. As humans increasingly rely on these extensions, whether it is language, media, or other technologies, they inadvertently create environments that alter their behaviors and interactions. These environments, shaped by artificial tools, profoundly affect human nature, often in ways that are difficult to control. Lorenz's warning is clear: the more we create and extend ourselves through tools, the more we must be aware of the potential for

destruction, especially when those tools—like language—can so easily be weaponized against each other.

In conclusion, language is not merely a neutral tool; it is an extension of human capacity with the power to manipulate, control, and harm. As with all human-made extensions, it carries the danger of detachment, reducing the sense of responsibility for the harm it can inflict. Humans must learn to navigate this dangerous terrain with caution, understanding that, as Lorenz and others have pointed out, the extensions we create, including language, can shape and distort human relationships and interactions, often in ways we struggle to fully comprehend or control. The "laws of language as a media" can be thought of as fundamental principles that describe how language, when understood as a medium, operates as an extension of human communication, thought, and interaction. Just as Marshall McLuhan proposed "laws of media" that apply to technological innovations and tools, we can derive similar "laws" for language. These laws consider language's dual role as a means of expression and as a tool with the capacity for both creation and destruction. Here are four possible "laws of language as a media":

1. Extension Law: Language extends thought and action.

Language extends human consciousness and ability, enabling us to externalize thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Just as tools extend physical capacities (a hammer extends the hand's power to build), language extends the mind's ability to communicate complex ideas, bridge time and space, and shape abstract concepts. It enables individuals to influence, persuade, and shape collective human experience.

2. Obsolescence Law: Language can obscure or distort meaning as new forms emerge.

As with any medium, language evolves, and older forms or meanings become obsolete. Over time, new jargon, slang, or specialized languages emerge that may obscure meaning or create barriers to understanding. What was once clear communication may become outdated or ineffective, as new words or connotations shift the landscape of meaning. The evolution of language often pushes earlier, more nuanced forms of expression into obsolescence, which can lead to miscommunication or loss of depth in human interactions.

3. Retrieval Law: Language revives primal emotions and ancestral narratives.

Language has the capacity to retrieve or evoke deep emotional and cultural memories. Through metaphors, storytelling, and rhetoric, language connects individuals to primal experiences—whether cultural, spiritual, or psychological. This retrieval can be empowering, as language brings collective history, archetypes, and universal human experiences back into the present, reinforcing identity and shared meaning.

4. Reversal Law: When pushed to its extreme, language becomes destructive.

As with any medium, when language is extended to its limits, it can reverse into its opposite. Language, when overly manipulated, distorted, or weaponized, becomes a tool of deception, manipulation, and division. Just as Konrad Lorenz suggests that humans cannot fully trust themselves with the tools they create, language can also become a weapon that alienates, harms, or distorts reality. Propaganda, misinformation, and verbal abuse illustrate this reversal, where

language ceases to facilitate understanding and becomes a tool for control, aggression, or isolation.

These laws highlight the dual nature of language: its creative potential and its capacity for harm. While language allows us to build connections, share knowledge, and articulate complex ideas, it also carries inherent risks when used carelessly or maliciously. Understanding these laws helps navigate the power of language as a media, ensuring it is wielded responsibly in both personal and societal contexts.

The Magic of Words

The starting point in researching the magic of words is an observation about everyday cultural life and the strange ways in which language quietly organises meaning within societies. One example appears in the rhythm of Spanish or French life. People walk, talk, celebrate, and move through a calendar filled with holidays that seem at first glance arbitrary or obscure. Yet these repeated rituals carry emotional significance because language surrounds them with narratives and symbols. Public holidays, church celebrations, and civic festivals form a cycle that gives structure to time. Even when the historical reasons behind these occasions are forgotten, language continues to sustain their meaning. What once may have been ordinary events gradually become symbols of national identity. The Tour de France and the Vuelta began as commercial promotions organised by newspapers, yet over time they were transformed through language and repetition into powerful cultural icons. What begins as commerce eventually becomes myth. In this way societies construct meaning not through objective necessity but through continuous linguistic reinforcement. Words, stories and rituals create the illusion of permanence around practices that originally possessed no intrinsic meaning.

The insight that language generates meaning rather than merely describing it lies at the centre of modern media theory. In *Laws of the Media: The New Science* Francis Bacon, Giambattista Vico and Marshall McLuhan appear as key figures in understanding how human expression shapes reality. Vico emphasised that poetic creation is not an ornamental activity but the fundamental process through which human beings organise experience. Poetry restores balance whenever rigid philosophical systems attempt to impose abstract explanations upon life. The greatest danger arises when philosophers forget that their systems are constructions and begin to believe them as literal truths. In earlier intellectual traditions the arts of rhetoric, dialectics and grammar formed a unified discipline through which language was studied as a living activity. Modern philosophy gradually lost contact with this tradition, separating logical argument from rhetorical expression and from the grammar that gives language its structure. Yet this lost connection has begun to return under the influence of electronic media. The emergence of electronic environments and digital networks has revived what McLuhan called acoustic space, a mode of perception in which sound, rhythm and resonance reorganise human awareness. Rather than contradicting visual forms of communication, this acoustic dimension complements them. Human perception always operates through multiple sensory spaces, each shaped by the technologies that amplify particular senses.

Different languages also reflect different balances between sensory and cognitive modes. The language of Arctic peoples has often been described as synthetic, expressing complex

relationships in a single word and relying heavily on contextual awareness. Such languages are associated with patterns of thought connected to the right hemisphere of the brain, emphasising holistic perception and relational understanding. English, by contrast, developed as a highly analytical language structured through grammatical segmentation and linear syntax. This structure corresponds to the cognitive orientation often attributed to the left hemisphere, which emphasises classification, sequence and abstraction. The development of writing, especially the phonetic alphabet, intensified this analytical orientation by translating speech into visible symbols arranged in linear order. The alphabet privileges visual organisation and encourages a form of thinking that isolates elements and arranges them in sequence. Other cultural forms such as woven patterns, lithographic designs or ornamental carpets do not impose such analytical structures. Their meaning emerges through patterns and relations rather than through discrete symbolic units. Societies shaped primarily by these forms did not develop the strong visual bias characteristic of Western civilisation. Instead their cultural expressions retained a more synthetic character in which forms appear concealed within patterns, almost as if meaning itself were hidden like magic beneath the surface of things. In synthetic languages words do not function simply as labels attached to objects. They operate as actions unfolding within the present moment. Such languages do not merely name things but bring them into existence through their use. Meaning arises here and now, within the situation in which language is spoken. In this sense early human communities behaved like phenomenologists long before the concept existed. They encountered the world directly and recited the book of nature aloud through speech and chant. Language did not describe nature from a distance but participated in its unfolding. To speak was to act, and through speech the world appeared. The origin of language therefore carries an element of awe. The act of speaking creates realities that did not previously exist, and this creative power demands responsibility. Words possess a transformative capacity capable of shaping the experience of being itself.

For this reason the power of language has long been regarded as something mysterious or even frightening. Words alter the structure of reality both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative transformation occurs when language organises perception through visual patterns associated with the analytical functions of the left hemisphere. Qualitative transformation occurs when language resonates acoustically through rhythm, tone and context, activating the relational awareness associated with the right hemisphere. Visual space tends to emphasise results, outcomes and measurable structures, while acoustic space emphasises process and interaction. Each technological medium amplifies one of these spaces and reshapes human perception accordingly. Print culture intensifies visual linearity, encouraging individuals to think sequentially and to define identity through consistent patterns of reasoning. Electronic media operate differently. Television and digital networks generate environments in which information flows continuously through resonant fields rather than fixed sequences. The result is a sensory environment resembling a nervous system extended across space, vibrating simultaneously in many places. This transformation of perception carries profound consequences. When communication technologies extend the nervous system outward, the individual consciousness becomes dispersed across networks of information. The mind appears to exist in many locations at once, detached from the physical body that once anchored it. Such an environment can weaken traditional structures of identity and authority. The right hemisphere's orientation toward resonance and immediacy may generate forms of experience

in which identity becomes fluid and unstable. At the same time the visual logic of the alphabet once played a decisive role in the historical expansion of Western civilisation. By translating diverse spoken languages into a common visual system, the phonetic alphabet enabled cultural transmission across large territories. This visual translation allowed literate societies to incorporate and reorganise other cultures within a shared framework of written communication. In this sense the alphabet functioned as a powerful instrument of cultural expansion. Through literacy the Church disseminated the Bible, weakening tribal bonds and reorganising communities around new forms of authority. Literacy campaigns often appeared as humanitarian projects, yet they also served the strategic purpose of consolidating cultural influence.

The spread of literacy, however, also disrupted older oral traditions that had preserved cultural memory across generations. Oral cultures relied on storytelling, ritual and collective recitation to transmit knowledge. These practices cultivated memory, imagination and communal identity. When writing replaced oral transmission, many of these traditions gradually disappeared. Communities such as the Roma preserved elements of oral heritage long after other societies embraced literacy, illustrating that oral tradition represents a distinct cultural pathway rather than a preliminary stage toward written civilisation. Yet once these traditions are lost they cannot easily be restored. The transition from oral to literate culture transforms the structure of thought itself. Reading and writing externalise memory, allowing words and ideas to exist outside the speaker. This externalisation can create distance between individuals and their own thoughts. When thoughts are placed outside the self they may become easier to organise, analyse and manipulate. But this process can also weaken the reflective consciousness that once observed the flow of thought from within. The transformation of consciousness produced by literacy has sometimes been described metaphorically as becoming empty of thought. Words leave the speaker and appear on the page, separating language from immediate experience. This separation creates individuals who can examine ideas from a distance but who may also become more susceptible to external control. A person who empties the mind of its own spontaneous voice may become easier to direct through institutional language. The disciplined warrior traditions of certain cultures illustrate a related psychological condition. Japanese samurai training emphasised the capacity to act as if already dead, freeing the warrior from fear or hesitation. To live as though one has already died is to perceive time differently, seeing past and future simultaneously without emotional attachment. In such a state the individual becomes calm, predictable and resolute. The poet William Butler Yeats once captured this paradox by saluting the figure who is ‘dead in life and alive in death’, suggesting a condition in which detachment reveals a deeper form of awareness.

Cultural systems express similar contrasts in different societies. Japan developed a powerful structure of shame in which social behaviour is regulated through internalised expectations of honour and dignity. Individuals discipline themselves because they fear the loss of face before others. In contrast, cultures lacking such systems rely more heavily on external regulation. These differences illustrate how language and social values interact to produce distinct forms of moral order. The history of writing systems further demonstrates the profound influence of linguistic technologies. The spread of the alphabet from ancient Rome across Europe reshaped cultural identity and political organisation. Imagining the adoption of alphabetic writing in civilisations such as China invites reflection on how radically such a transformation could alter

cultural perception. Chinese painting, for example, emphasises immersion in nature and identification with the living flow of the world. Rather than conquering nature through representation, the artist seeks to dissolve within it, allowing forms to emerge gradually from the movement of life. Giambattista Vico once suggested that to rediscover the origins of wisdom one must imagine a world without books. Knowledge would then arise again from direct observation and experience, much like the elders of traditional communities who interpret the voices of the forest or the rhythms of the landscape. Such elders are valued not because they possess abstract theories but because they embody a poetic sensibility capable of perceiving patterns in nature. In this perspective the ancient idea of *logos* emerges not simply as rational discourse but as the creative speech through which the world becomes intelligible. Words and things mirror one another in a dynamic process of creation. Speech orders reality, and through language human beings participate in the unfolding of the cosmos.

Modern media analysis sometimes forgets this creative dimension of language. Investigators of communication often moralise about the effects of media rather than seeking to understand how technological environments reshape perception. In doing so they replace analysis with judgment. Earlier scientific models of communication, such as the linear transmission scheme proposed by Shannon and Weaver, imagined communication as a pipeline through which messages travel from sender to receiver. Such models cannot fully grasp the complexity of contemporary information environments shaped by electricity and digital networks. These environments transform perception itself, altering the sensory balance through which human beings experience the world. The challenge for media theory is therefore not to condemn or celebrate these transformations but to understand how the magic of words and technologies continues to reorganise the conditions of human existence.

Poetry Founded Humanity

Giambattista Vico proposed that everything in nature speaks in the language of Jupiter and that theology is nothing other than knowledge of the speech of the gods. In this vision the human being is the first utterance through which nature addresses the divine. Goethe echoes this insight in the simple but profound assertion that man is speech. Language is therefore not merely a scientific system or a neutral code for transmitting information. It is a living field of metaphors, myths and figures through which human beings encounter the world. Nature itself appears as a poetic language, and the earliest forms of human understanding were expressed not in theoretical treatises but in stories, proverbs and fables. Vico insisted that the wisdom of the ancients survives most clearly in these anonymous expressions of folk knowledge. Proverbs, myths and fables contain what he called the *vocabulario mentale*, the mental vocabulary through which imagination gives structure to experience. Language becomes humanity's second nature because it translates contact with the natural world into symbolic forms. Through metaphor, exchange and translation, experience moves from one mode of perception into another. Yet the transformation carries a cost. When sensory experiences are translated into stable linguistic systems they gradually become closed structures that detach themselves from the living immediacy of experience.

The emergence of technology intensifies this process. Technological systems create instantaneous forms of existence in which experience is organised collectively and often stereotyped. Modern technologies operate simultaneously and globally. They do not tolerate closed boundaries or isolated systems but absorb everything around them. This produces a tension between collective interaction and individual rational reflection. Human beings feel the world through language and at the same time inhabit a universe of objects shaped by linguistic interpretation. Language surrounds the individual like a magic circle. Wilhelm von Humboldt observed that one can escape such a circle only by stepping into another. Liberation therefore does not lie in abandoning language but in transforming the forms through which language shapes perception. For this reason artistic activity becomes a crucial form of resistance. Serious art functions as satire and mirror. It exposes the tyranny of language precisely by using language against itself. When language is used naively it overwhelms thought, but when it is approached ironically it reveals its own mechanisms. Like Perseus confronting the Gorgon through reflection in a shield, the artist must avoid confronting language directly. Instead language must be used obliquely, through reflection and distance, so that its power can be recognised without turning the observer to stone.

In certain cultures art is not separated from everyday life. On the island of Bali people sometimes claim that they do not possess a distinct category called art. Instead they simply attempt to do everything in the best possible way. Such an approach often demands great effort because excellence is difficult, yet this difficulty is precisely what sustains creative vitality. Art becomes inseparable from life itself, and life is understood as a demanding activity rather than a spectacle. When cultures begin to think of art as a separate domain they risk reducing it to display. At that moment the creative impulse weakens because artistic practice becomes a label rather than a discipline. Cultures that abandon difficult forms of creation gradually replace them with superficial gestures that imitate artistic form without preserving its depth. The internal structure of art can be described through a grammar composed of four fundamental figures of speech. These figures function as syntactic operations within the imagination. They are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Each of these figures represents a distinct postulate of imaginative thought. Metaphor establishes similarity between different domains of experience. Metonymy connects elements through contiguity or association. Synecdoche allows a part to stand for a whole or a whole to represent its parts. Irony introduces reflexive distance by dividing the consciousness of those who understand the hidden meaning from those who do not. These figures together constitute the grammar through which artistic expression operates. When metaphor loses its grounding in lived experience it degenerates into metonymy, synecdoche or irony. Artistic language therefore demands continual renewal through perception. The task of interpretation is not to decode a genetic code of meaning but to decipher the code of perception itself. Genuine artistic forms always contain unresolved questions and cannot be fully tested through empirical methods. They remain open structures through which imagination continues to operate.

The use of figures of speech involves a transformation in the relation between the knower and the known. Knowledge does not stand outside experience as a detached object but enters the consciousness of the one who perceives it. The process resembles learning through participation rather than observation. To know something in this sense is to merge with it. The knowing consciousness becomes inseparable from the knowledge it acquires. Yet this merging often

produces estrangement from the ordinary life of the community. A person who enters deeply into knowledge may appear separated from the living rhythm of the tribe. Plato recognised this transformative power and expressed suspicion toward poets precisely because their language could enchant listeners and transport them into a new mode of being. Poetry does not merely describe reality but alters the consciousness of those who hear it. For Plato this enchantment represented a danger because it blurred the boundary between appearance and truth. In societies governed by oral traditions such transformations occurred through mimesis, a process that united the community through shared performance. In mimetic cultures the connection between speaker and listener remained immediate. The tribe remembered its stories through collective recitation and maintained extraordinary capacities of poetic memory. Oral cultures could preserve complex narratives for decades through rhythmic repetition and communal participation. Yet this enormous memory capacity came at the cost of objectivity. In mimetic consciousness the listener does not observe the story from a distance but becomes immersed in it. Myth and magic replace analytical separation. There is no distinction between figure and ground, no separation between representation and reality. Experience becomes a continuous transformation in which identity flows with the narrative being performed.

Plato opposed this condition and attempted to establish a different form of knowledge grounded in scientific reasoning and education. His philosophical project sought to replace mimetic participation with analytical reflection. This shift required the development of visual space, a cognitive environment distinct from the acoustic space of oral culture. The invention of consonantal writing contributed to this transformation by introducing abstract signs that represent sounds which do not exist as independent objects in nature. A consonant functions as a conceptual abstraction detached from immediate perception. A phoneme may be described as perception without concept, whereas a consonant becomes a concept without perception. Writing thus separates internal experience from external expression by introducing symbols that exist only within thought. The Greek alphabet, adapted from Phoenician signs, exemplifies this process of abstraction. Letters such as alpha, beta and gamma originally served as simple markers to assist children in memorising the order of sounds. Over time they became components of a universal system capable of recording speech independently of any specific cultural context. The alphabet operates as an abstract container that holds sounds stripped of particular meaning. Once learned, the system becomes so familiar that its artificial character disappears from awareness. Letters possess no intrinsic properties and carry no meaning apart from their role within the structure of language. They function as neutral signs through which speech can be reconstructed in memory.

Before the invention of writing human beings relied entirely on mimesis as the method of knowing. Mimesis was not merely imitation but a technique through which knowledge emerged by merging with what was known. The subject of knowledge became identical with its object. Such knowledge could not claim objectivity because the knower remained immersed within the experience itself. Through poetic performance listeners entered a new mode of being in which myth and memory shaped their perception. In this state the tribe maintained unity because everyone shared the same narrative field. When someone repeated what the poet had said about Achilles, the words carried authority not because they were analysed but because they were remembered collectively. Oral Greek culture preserved these narratives for generations, creating vast reservoirs of memory sustained through rhythm and performance. The arrival of

alphabetic writing disrupted this mimetic unity. Visual literacy introduced a new tension within Greek culture by separating individuals from the communal traditions that had previously bound them together. The alphabet marked the beginning of conflicts between different social groups because it allowed knowledge to be stored outside collective memory. Plato attacked the influence of mimetic poetry in his vision of the ideal state because he regarded poetic enchantment as an obstacle to rational inquiry. Scientific reasoning required classification, causal explanation and analytical distance. Individuals needed to examine their experiences rather than simply repeating them. The alphabet enabled such examination by converting speech into visible signs that could be analysed.

The secret of the alphabet lies not in writing but in reading. Reading is an act of recognition that reorganises perception. Through reading the mind develops a new dominant mode of awareness in which abstract visual space replaces the resonant acoustic field of oral culture. Geometry emerges from this transformation. Parallel lines extending toward infinity become imaginable because space is conceived as an abstract container independent of sensory experience. Pre-alphabetic acoustic space had been spherical and immersive, but alphabetic culture constructs a linear sequence of signs representing speech through isolated visual units. This isolation allows the alphabet to translate sounds from any language into the same symbolic framework, detaching communication from specific traditions or identities. Visual space becomes an internal conceptual reality in which the Western intellectual tradition develops its earliest paradigms. The transition from religion to philosophy corresponds to this new sensibility. Dialectic reasoning and geometric abstraction emerge from the alphabetic environment that encourages analysis of being as a set of conceptual forms. In earlier mimetic experience existence flowed through continuous transformation, much like the mythical figure Proteus who changed shape to avoid capture. When the senses operate together in acoustic space, experience remains dynamic and metamorphic. When sight dominates perception, the universe appears static and structured. The world becomes a collection of representations rather than an ongoing process of creation.

Logical reasoning reflects this visual structure. The syllogism connects premises and conclusions within a linear sequence. A proposition becomes true when its conclusion follows coherently from its premises. The sense of truth arises from the visual order that connects statements in a clear beginning and end. Logical systems rely on the properties of visual space, where elements are arranged sequentially within a container of abstract extension. Euclidean geometry embodies this visual logic by treating space as homogeneous, static and infinitely divisible. Yet other conceptions of space exist. Acoustic space resembles the dynamic field described in modern physics, where relationships emerge through resonance rather than fixed boundaries. Visual space is therefore a cultural artifact rather than a natural given. It isolates vision from other senses and treats the alphabet as a figure without background. In nature such figures do not exist because the world appears as a mosaic of continuous transformation. Nevertheless, the alphabet simplifies complexity by organising perception into discrete units. Its purpose is to construct rational space, a homogeneous field within which analysis and calculation become possible. In visual culture motion and rest appear as opposites, whereas acoustic experience integrates them within a resonant field. Contemporary electronic environments, emerging after the age of print, begin to restore aspects of acoustic perception by emphasising simultaneity and resonance.

In early Greek cosmology the structure of the universe was described through the concept of logos. Logos signified both word and ordering principle, a resonant expression through which the cosmos gained form. Myth and speech were intertwined as manifestations of the same creative power. Human language mirrored the structure of the world because the capacity to speak belonged to the natural order itself. Empires later transformed this organic connection into bureaucratic organisation. Imperial languages spread across vast territories, but in doing so they often replaced the living traditions of local communities with standardised slogans and official formulas. Only within the acoustic space of living speech can the tribal culture of affection and mutual recognition survive. In spoken language the memories of centuries remain encoded and transmitted across generations. The official language of empire, by contrast, reduces this living heritage to simplified phrases repeated mechanically across the population.

Disappearance of Future

The contrast between Parni Valjak's 'Hrast' and Nirvana's 'About a Girl' reveals a decisive difference in the way songs carry meaning within culture. One song speaks from within a community shaped by a shared language, a long memory, and a place inhabited for generations. The other speaks to millions, but it does so through abstraction, through a message broad enough to circulate globally and empty enough to survive that circulation. 'Hrast' belongs to a world in which meaning cannot be separated from language, context, and inherited experience. To understand it, one must understand Croatian, but more than that, one must inhabit the emotional and historical texture that the language carries. Its meaning is not reducible to the words alone, nor to melody, nor to chords. It lies in something denser and less transferable, in a cultural substance that cannot be translated without being altered. It speaks to a limited community, but precisely because of that limitation it preserves a depth inaccessible to mass culture. 'About a Girl', by contrast, functions at the level of emotional generality. It can be heard by millions because it is detachable from any one setting. It carries themes that are legible everywhere, love, frustration, distance, desire, but it does so by leaving behind the specific cultural weight that gives local songs their rootedness. This makes it globally accessible, but also more abstract, more mobile, and therefore more available to the machinery of mass consumption.

The difference is not simply between two songs or two bands. It is the difference between a song that emerges from a place and returns to that place, and a song that enters the world market as a floating sign, capable of being consumed across borders because it has already been loosened from the thickness of local life. If something like 'Hrast' were absorbed into a song like 'About a Girl', the result would illustrate the broader fate of culture under mass mediation: the local becomes abstract, the concrete becomes exportable, and meaning is diluted in the very process that gives it international visibility. This is why the problem cannot be understood merely as plagiarism or influence. It is a problem of translation into the mass system, where singular meaning is turned into exchangeable cultural material. What is lost is not only authenticity but density, the density of shared knowledge that once made art an intimate act of recognition rather than a universal commodity. This tension helps explain why Mark Fisher's reflections on the 'slow cancellation of the future' remain so powerful. In 'Ghosts of My Life', Fisher extends the argument he had earlier developed in 'Capitalist Realism'. If that earlier

work described the saturation of life by capital, not only in the economy but in consciousness itself, this later work turns toward what remains, toward the spectres of unrealised futures, the traces of worlds that were once imagined but never arrived. Fisher's diagnosis is not simply that culture has become repetitive. It is that time itself has been damaged. The future has not disappeared in the literal sense, but it no longer arrives as rupture, promise, or transformation. Instead, culture drifts in a prolonged temporal malaise, a condition in which the present cannot break with the past and the new appears only as recombination, as stylistic adjustment, as replay. In this situation, history itself weakens. Fisher draws here on Fredric Jameson's concept of the waning of historicity, the sense that postmodern culture does not so much reject history as flatten it into an archive of recyclable forms.

At the same time, he connects this historical flattening to everyday life, to the rhythms of communicative capitalism identified by Jodi Dean, where attention is fragmented by endless demands, notifications, messages, feeds, and signals. The individual does not simply live in the present; one is trapped in a hyperactive present with no horizon. Under such conditions it becomes increasingly difficult to feel historical time as a movement. The twenty-first century then begins to resemble a high-definition replay of the twentieth. The forms remain, the screens improve, the speed accelerates, but the future itself ceases to arrive as a meaningful break. What once would have been recognised as a new direction now appears only as another modulation of the already familiar. This gives Fisher's reflections on Kurt Cobain their deeper significance. Cobain's suicide in 1994 was not only a biographical tragedy. For Fisher it became a symptom, a cultural event expressing the impossibility of inhabiting a present that had already absorbed rebellion into its own circuits. Cobain appeared as someone who represented a break, or at least the desire for one, but who was ultimately captured by the machinery he despised. He became part of MTV, the record industry, the larger business apparatus that turns rupture into style and dissent into profitable imagery. In that sense, he became what he hated. The problem was not personal hypocrisy but structural inevitability. Any figure who achieves mass visibility under these conditions risks becoming an instrument of the system that first appeared to be challenged. Cobain's anguish can therefore be read as emblematic of a broader cultural contradiction. He stood for the possibility of a future different from the managed present, yet his image was rapidly converted into one more component of that present. Fisher recognised in this not simply an individual collapse but a whole cultural logic. The same can be said of Fisher himself. His suicide in 2017 inevitably invites comparison with Cobain's, not because the two lives were identical, but because both were marked by an acute sensitivity to the conditions of temporal stasis. Both seemed unable to accept a world in which the future had been gradually stolen, where longing remained but the structures that might sustain newness had been dismantled. Fisher insists that the rise of the internet intensified this condition. The digital archive makes the past omnipresent. Everything remains available, retrievable, rewatchable, remixable. Nothing disappears fully, but because nothing disappears, nothing can become properly distant either. The archaic survives alongside the current, and the current is immediately folded back into the archive.

The result is not abundance in any emancipatory sense, but a suffocating continuity. Even the futuristic becomes only a style among others, a genre marker, no longer a serious anticipation of what has not yet come. In such a world culture stops expecting decisive breaks. Music, once a privileged site of generational rupture, now offers mostly minor recalibrations, detectable only

to specialists immersed in small differences. The ordinary listener ceases to expect transformation and learns instead to consume subtle variations within an established field. The disappearance of the future is therefore not simply aesthetic. It is political. Fisher connects it to the erosion of social democracy, especially in Britain, where structures that once gave people time, shelter, and support, student grants, affordable housing, welfare provisions, were gradually dismantled under neoliberalism. These structures had made experimentation possible. They created the breathing space in which culture could risk the new. Once they disappeared, culture lost not only resources but horizons. The future became harder to imagine because the institutions that might have housed it were no longer there. Fisher leaves the problem unresolved, but not empty. The choice is not between naïve optimism and nostalgia. It is between resignation and a difficult fidelity to the sense that something else should be possible, even if the present offers little evidence for it.

In that sense Cobain and Fisher remain figures of refusal. They could not reconcile themselves to a world where history had become replay and where novelty had been reduced to reformatting. Their deaths mark the unbearable pressure of such a world, but their work also names its structure. The disappearance of the future is not merely a mood. It is a condition produced by cultural abstraction, technological repetition, and political closure. What vanishes is not time itself, but the shared capacity to believe that another time might still come.

The Silent Language

Edward T. Hall in *The Silent Language* and Konrad Lorenz in *On Aggression* together offer a way of understanding how human beings communicate and organise themselves through forces that often operate beneath conscious awareness. Hall's central insight is that culture speaks silently. Words are only one layer of communication, while time, space, gesture, rhythm, behaviour, material arrangements, and unspoken expectations form a deeper system that governs how people relate to one another. Culture is not simply expressed through speech but embedded in patterns that people absorb so completely that they cease to notice them. Time itself becomes a language. Different cultures organise time differently, and these differing temporal habits shape relationships, obligations, work, and the sense of social order. Space also communicates. The distance between bodies, the use of rooms, the way territories are marked, and the boundary between public and private all carry meaning before a single word is spoken. Hall shows that culture is communication because it provides the background codes through which behaviour becomes intelligible.

These codes form a cultural vocabulary, but it is not a vocabulary of dictionary definitions. It is a vocabulary of practices, habits, and silent rules. What counts as politeness, what counts as delay, what counts as intrusion, what counts as proper conduct, all of this is communicated without explicit statement. Such silent structures organise perception and behaviour so thoroughly that they can either expand understanding or confine it. Culture thus appears as an organising pattern that shapes how people think, perceive, and act. It creates what Hall calls pervasive sets, frameworks of assumption that structure the world before the individual begins to interpret it consciously. These sets can be enabling, but they can also become restrictive. Because they are largely invisible, they can limit communication while appearing natural. What

one takes to be common sense may simply be a local cultural code that excludes other forms of experience. In this way the silent language has a darker side. It is not only a medium of belonging but also a mechanism of control. It enforces norms without declaring them openly. It shapes conduct without seeming coercive. It produces misunderstandings, alienation, and conflict precisely because its rules are rarely brought fully into awareness. Hall's chapter on the illusive isolate demonstrates this clearly. Isolation is not always physical separation. It can arise when people occupy the same space yet remain cut off by incompatible systems of cultural meaning. Miscommunication then does not result merely from speaking different words, but from inhabiting different silent languages. The same gesture, the same delay, the same spatial arrangement, or the same silence may communicate entirely different meanings to different people. Such differences can generate distrust and exclusion. The unspoken rules of culture become barriers, and because they are unconscious they are especially difficult to challenge. Hall's argument therefore suggests that language is never neutral. Even beyond explicit speech, culture instructs individuals in how to see the world and how to behave within it. It forms not only communication but obedience. It can reinforce hierarchy and inequality because those who control the codes of a culture often appear simply to embody normality itself.

What is called civility, discipline, efficiency, or good conduct may be a form of silent domination. Hall ends by suggesting that one must loosen the grip of these hidden assumptions through greater awareness, but the need for such loosening reveals how strong the grip already is. Konrad Lorenz approaches a different problem, yet his work intersects with Hall's in revealing how deeply human behaviour is shaped by forces that are older and more powerful than conscious intention. In *On Aggression* Lorenz argues that aggression is not an accidental deviation from life but an instinct with deep biological roots. In animals, aggression serves survival. It protects territory, secures mates, defends offspring, and establishes order within groups. It is not simply destructive; it has an evolutionary role. Yet Lorenz also warns that in human societies aggression can become detached from the natural checks that regulate it in the animal world. Many animals ritualise aggression. They fight through displays, signals, and controlled confrontation that reduce the likelihood of total destruction. Human beings, however, possess forms of communication and technology that vastly extend their aggressive potential. Language becomes central here. It allows people not only to express aggression but to store it, circulate it, and intensify it symbolically. Through rhetoric, slogans, propaganda, insults, and ideological discourse, aggression can be amplified beyond immediate physical encounters. Words can wound, inflame, and dehumanise. They can mobilise whole groups against enemies, justify violence, and transform hostility into durable social structures.

Lorenz's account of ritualised aggression in animals therefore casts a harsh light on the human situation. Humans often lack comparable verbal restraints. Language can become a weapon unconstrained by the bodily limits that contain aggression in other species. It can generate escalations that are psychological, political, and collective. In this sense the dark side of language mirrors the dark side of aggression itself. What begins as a tool for survival and cooperation becomes, when misdirected, a tool of manipulation, symbolic violence, and hatred. Lorenz also emphasises territoriality, and this too acquires a linguistic dimension in human civilisation. People defend not only land and resources but opinions, ideologies, identities, and symbolic boundaries. Verbal territory becomes as fiercely guarded as physical space. Language marks inclusion and exclusion, draws lines between legitimate and illegitimate speech, and

turns disagreement into conflict. Social structures then intensify this aggression by embedding it within institutions and hierarchies. Language used inside such structures can marginalise, shame, isolate, or mobilise entire groups. The word becomes an instrument of organised aggression. Lorenz's warnings become especially relevant when applied to modern civilisation and the large city. In the vast social organisations of urban life, people live close together yet remain emotionally distant. Lorenz notes that some animal colonies function through proximity without affection, through co-existence organised by practical necessity rather than by love or personal recognition.

Modern cities often resemble such structures. People share streets, offices, transport systems, apartment blocks, and bureaucratic networks, but their relations are frequently utilitarian. Language in these settings often serves not intimacy but functionality. It coordinates transactions, instructions, permissions, schedules, rules, and routines. It keeps the machine running. Yet the more language is reduced to this automatic role, the more it can contribute to a social world lacking warmth or attachment. Communication continues, but connection diminishes. Just as certain animals live in colonies without deep mutual bonds, modern humans may inhabit large collective systems without love. In such environments language becomes procedural, bureaucratic, and often impersonal. It facilitates interaction while simultaneously maintaining distance. This does not make it harmless. On the contrary, the colder and more functional language becomes, the easier it is for aggression to be embedded within it. Administrative discourse can exclude as effectively as direct hostility. Professional speech can flatten human feeling. Political rhetoric can transform entire populations into categories and abstractions. Lorenz's account suggests that when aggression is disconnected from natural forms of regulation it can become destructive, and modern language intensifies that danger by giving aggression symbolic reach. Hall's account of silent cultural codes deepens this insight by showing that even when speech appears calm, the structures beneath it may still enforce domination and exclusion. Together these two works reveal that human communication is not only expressive but regulatory, not only connective but potentially violent. The city, the institution, and the modern social order rely upon language to sustain their systems, yet the same language can deepen alienation when it no longer carries love, recognition, or genuine relation. In this condition communication becomes automatic, and the automatic easily becomes aggressive.

What appears as social order may conceal profound emotional impoverishment. Language then serves to hold together a civilisation whose members increasingly interact without attachment, through codes and routines that keep the structure functioning while hollowing out the bonds between persons. The result is a form of organised life in which aggression, silence, and impersonal communication reinforce one another. Hall shows how culture silently trains people into hidden structures of meaning, while Lorenz shows how instinct and aggression, when amplified by human forms of communication, can escape natural restraint. Together they suggest that language in modern civilisation is not simply a bridge between people but also a force that can regulate, isolate, and wound. In large impersonal systems, where communication is abundant but love is weak, language becomes both the medium of coordination and the trigger of decay.

Virtue of Scientific Humility

Konrad Lorenz in the chapter 'On the Virtue of Scientific Humility' argues that humanity must overcome several forms of intellectual pride if it wishes to understand its own behaviour. According to Lorenz, one of the most serious barriers to self-knowledge lies in the reluctance to accept that human beings are products of biological evolution. Many people resist the idea that humanity emerged from the same evolutionary processes that shaped other animals. The emotional rejection of kinship with species such as chimpanzees reflects not a scientific argument but a deeply rooted discomfort with acknowledging our biological origins. This refusal prevents an honest investigation into the instincts that continue to influence human conduct, particularly aggression. A second obstacle arises from the belief that human behaviour is governed solely by free will or by higher metaphysical purposes rather than by natural causation. This belief encourages the illusion that human actions exist outside the laws that govern the rest of nature.

When behaviour is treated as exempt from scientific explanation, serious inquiry becomes difficult. A third obstacle derives from philosophical idealism within the Western intellectual tradition. According to this view, phenomena that can be explained through natural science are assumed to lack spiritual or moral significance. Such an assumption discourages scientific approaches to the study of human conduct because it treats biological explanations as inherently degrading to human dignity. Lorenz argues that these three obstacles together create a powerful resistance to understanding human aggression in its evolutionary context. Yet overcoming them is essential in a world where technological power has given humanity unprecedented capacity for destruction. Scientific humility therefore means accepting that human behaviour, including aggression, emerges from natural processes and must be studied with the same seriousness as any other biological phenomenon. Recognising these origins does not diminish human life but deepens appreciation for the complexity of evolution and the fragile conditions that sustain civilisation. The scientific investigation of behaviour becomes a necessary form of responsibility rather than an attack on human values.

Lorenz's reflections also illuminate the character of modern civilisation. When large societies expand into enormous cities and complex institutions, social life increasingly takes on an impersonal structure. People interact through systems governed by rules, schedules and functional requirements rather than through personal bonds. In such environments language becomes the principal medium through which these interactions occur. Words coordinate activity, regulate behaviour and maintain the routines that allow large populations to coexist. Yet this communication often lacks the emotional depth that once accompanied speech within smaller communities. In dense urban environments individuals may live close together while remaining strangers to one another. The language they exchange performs practical tasks but rarely establishes enduring connections. Civilisation thus begins to resemble a structure organised without love, a system sustained through communication that functions automatically rather than personally. Lorenz's observations of animal behaviour offer a striking comparison. Certain species live in colonies where individuals remain in constant proximity yet display little affection beyond specific functions such as mating or territorial defence. Their interactions serve practical purposes but do not produce lasting bonds. Large cities may operate in a similar way. Human beings share streets, workplaces and institutions while their relationships remain

largely utilitarian. Communication continues, but the warmth that once accompanied it fades. Language in such circumstances becomes an instrument for maintaining order rather than nurturing community.

Within these environments language can also intensify competition and conflict. Just as animals respond to environmental triggers that provoke aggression, human beings use language in ways that express rivalry, defend territory and establish hierarchy. Words may serve to assert status, justify authority or reinforce divisions between groups. Instead of promoting understanding they often reproduce the structures that separate individuals from one another. The communication systems of modern civilisation therefore sustain both cooperation and alienation simultaneously. They allow complex societies to function while contributing to the emotional distance that characterises large urban environments. Language becomes a mechanism that keeps the system operating even when personal bonds weaken. In such a setting individuals risk becoming interchangeable components within an impersonal machine, their interactions governed more by procedures than by empathy. Lorenz's discussion of aggression suggests that such systems remain fragile. A civilisation lacking personal connection may maintain stability for a time, yet it depends on communication patterns that can easily become destructive. When language is used without empathy it can accelerate misunderstanding, hostility and division. The same tool that coordinates social order can also undermine it. A society organised around impersonal interaction therefore contains the possibility of sudden breakdown. The absence of genuine bonds makes institutions vulnerable because individuals feel little attachment to structures that govern them. Communication persists, but it does not necessarily sustain solidarity. In this sense language may contribute both to the maintenance of civilisation and to its vulnerability.

Lorenz returns repeatedly to the importance of self-knowledge. Understanding the biological roots of aggression allows humanity to recognise the instincts that continue to influence behaviour even within highly developed societies. Scientific humility requires acknowledging that rational thought and technological progress have not erased these instincts. Instead they coexist with them, sometimes amplifying their consequences. Modern civilisation possesses tools capable of inflicting damage on a scale unimaginable in earlier periods, yet the emotional structures guiding human behaviour have changed far more slowly. Language and conceptual thought give human beings extraordinary power to organise collective action, but they also create new possibilities for conflict when abstract ideas become objects of loyalty or hostility. Values transmitted through language can mobilise intense emotional responses. Ideologies, national identities and moral doctrines acquire the capacity to inspire devotion or aggression when people believe these symbols are threatened. Lorenz describes this phenomenon as militant enthusiasm, a state in which instinctual emotion merges with socially learned values communicated through language. In such moments abstract words can motivate individuals to sacrifice themselves or attack others in defence of symbolic causes.

In the chapter 'Ecce Homo!' Lorenz imagines how an observer from outside humanity might interpret human history. Such an observer might conclude that despite humanity's capacity for reasoning and language, behaviour often appears driven by instinctual forces rather than by deliberate reflection. Language and conceptual thinking have allowed cultural evolution to proceed at extraordinary speed. Technologies, institutions and political systems have developed

far more rapidly than the biological instincts that guide human responses. This imbalance creates dangerous situations. Humans possess weapons capable of killing at great distances, removing the immediate emotional feedback that might otherwise restrain aggression. In animals many forms of conflict are regulated by instinctive signals that prevent lethal escalation. Human beings, however, can inflict harm without experiencing the physical presence of their opponents. Language and symbolic thought extend the reach of aggression beyond the natural limits that once constrained it. Yet Lorenz does not regard language solely as a destructive force. The same capacities that allow symbolic conflict also make possible reflection and moral responsibility. Cultural traditions transmitted through language shape ethical systems that can restrain aggression and encourage cooperation. Human beings are therefore caught between two tendencies: the biological instincts inherited from evolutionary history and the cultural frameworks created through language and thought. Scientific humility requires recognising this dual condition. Humanity cannot rely exclusively on reason while ignoring instinct, nor can it abandon moral reflection in favour of biological determinism. Understanding the origins of behaviour allows societies to design institutions and practices that mitigate the dangers arising from this tension.

Lorenz ultimately insists that knowledge of human nature must be approached without arrogance. The recognition that aggression has natural origins does not justify violence, but it explains why moral exhortation alone cannot eliminate destructive behaviour. A responsible civilisation must confront its biological inheritance honestly while developing cultural forms capable of guiding it toward constructive ends. Language and conceptual thought place humanity in a unique position. They provide the means to reflect upon instincts, communicate values and organise collective action. At the same time they introduce new risks by transforming emotions into ideological conflicts that can spread across entire societies. The virtue of scientific humility lies in acknowledging both the power and the danger of these capacities. Only by recognising the natural forces that shape behaviour can humanity hope to manage them responsibly and prevent the destructive consequences that arise when technological power outruns self-understanding.

The Dark Side of Language

There is no innocent civilisation. Every grand empire, however noble its ideals may appear, eventually becomes a mechanism for power, control, and domination. This transformation is not simply the result of corruption or moral failure; it emerges from the logic of scale. As human groups expand and societies grow larger, systems of power inevitably concentrate authority. Individuals cease to be treated as ends in themselves and instead become instruments within the machinery of rule. Terry Pratchett expressed this transformation with striking clarity when he observed that evil begins the moment people start treating other people as things. Within the framework of empire this reduction becomes normalised. People are converted into units of labour, population statistics, military resources, or administrative categories. They become components necessary for maintaining the structure of power rather than persons recognised for their intrinsic value.

To sustain such a structure an empire must impose linguistic order. Control over territory requires control over communication. Empires therefore enforce a dominant language that replaces the smaller languages of local communities. These minor languages once carried within them the accumulated memory of traditions, practical knowledge, and cultural imagination. They contained ways of understanding the world that had developed slowly within particular landscapes and communities. Yet in the pursuit of administrative unity these languages are gradually silenced. They disappear under the pressure of standardisation as imperial authority spreads its preferred language across diverse regions. Uniform speech becomes the instrument through which governance, law, taxation, and military command are organised. The suppression of linguistic diversity therefore reflects not merely cultural change but the consolidation of power. Paradoxically, the same empire that imposes linguistic unity must simultaneously generate division within its own language. Vast populations cannot be governed through a single homogeneous form of communication. As the structures of empire grow more complex, the dominant language fractures internally into specialised vocabularies. Bureaucratic terminology, legal language, military jargon, financial discourse, academic codes, and criminal slang appear as distinct layers within the imperial language. Each of these linguistic strata corresponds to particular structures of authority or networks of activity. Through them the empire organises the circulation of information while preserving hidden hierarchies of knowledge and power. What appears outwardly as linguistic unity therefore conceals an intricate internal fragmentation. Language is unified to suppress diversity but divided to administer control. This dual process reflects the central logic of empire: cohesion for the sake of authority combined with fragmentation for the sake of management.

At the centre of this system stands language itself. In its imperial form language ceases to function primarily as a medium of dialogue or understanding. Instead it becomes a tool of classification and manipulation. Through language populations are counted, categorised, regulated, and mobilised. Administrative speech transforms people into numbers, economic units, demographic segments, or political categories. Words that once carried the warmth of conversation are replaced by formulas of command and management. In this transformation the darker side of civilisation becomes visible. Communication no longer serves human connection but the maintenance of systems that treat individuals as resources. Empires therefore rule not only through armies and institutions but through the linguistic structures that organise perception and behaviour. Language becomes the mechanism through which domination acquires legitimacy. The language of empire inevitably reflects the violence embedded within large-scale civilisations. Empires are the most expansive forms of political organisation, and their communication systems mirror the imperatives of control that sustain them. Through language empires shape how populations interpret the world. Narratives, slogans, and official vocabularies construct a framework within which power appears justified. By defining enemies, describing allies, and naming threats, imperial discourse directs attention and emotion in ways that reinforce authority. The empire does not merely occupy territory; it occupies the conceptual space within which its subjects understand reality.

This dynamic becomes particularly visible when empires portray themselves as defenders of moral order against external evil. Language serves as the instrument through which this moral theatre is staged. An empire that wishes to legitimise its actions must construct a narrative in which its own power appears necessary and righteous. The enemy becomes the embodiment of

evil, while the empire presents itself as the guardian of civilisation. Such rhetoric transforms geopolitical competition into a moral struggle. A striking example occurred in 1983 when Ronald Reagan described the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire'. Delivered during the tension of the Cold War, this speech did more than criticise a political rival. By identifying the Soviet Union as the focus of evil in the modern world, Reagan framed the conflict as a struggle between moral opposites. The rhetorical effect was immediate: once the enemy was defined as evil, the empire opposing it appeared comparatively virtuous. Even if the empire's own actions were questionable, they could be justified as necessary responses to a greater threat. This technique is deeply rooted in the history of empire. By presenting the enemy as an embodiment of evil, imperial power absolves itself of its own contradictions. When a clear villain is identified, the empire's internal problems fade from view. The population is encouraged to interpret every action through the lens of moral conflict. Reagan explicitly warned against the temptation to treat both sides as equally responsible, urging listeners instead to recognise the struggle between good and evil. In this rhetorical structure neutrality becomes betrayal, and criticism becomes weakness. Language therefore mobilises loyalty by transforming political complexity into moral clarity.

Yet the empire that defines its enemy as evil does not thereby become good. At best it becomes the lesser of two evils. Every large system of power eventually confronts the same paradox. The ideals that once inspired its creation gradually lose their vitality. What begins as a living belief slowly hardens into ideology. Words that once carried conviction become empty formulas repeated out of habit. Citizens continue to speak the language of loyalty even when genuine belief has faded. This stage marks the beginning of imperial decline. When faith in the guiding ideals disappears, the empire persists through routine rather than conviction. Cynicism replaces enthusiasm, and individuals learn to navigate the system primarily for personal survival. Nevertheless the language of empire can continue to mobilise people even during this period of decay. The image of a threatening enemy remains a powerful instrument. As long as an external evil can be invoked, populations may rally around the institutions that claim to protect them. The rhetoric of danger sustains unity long after belief in the empire's values has weakened. Language therefore prolongs the life of imperial systems by continually redefining the threats that justify their existence.

History shows, however, that such control cannot endure indefinitely. When imperial authority weakens, alternative social structures begin to appear. Smaller communities and informal networks develop outside the official institutions of power. Václav Havel described such formations as 'parallel structures', spaces where individuals organise their lives independently of the dominant system. These structures may arise quietly within the cracks of empire, creating zones of autonomy that escape the reach of central authority. They do not necessarily embody moral purity, but they represent an attempt to live beyond the language imposed by the empire. In certain circumstances even groups operating outside the law may appear more coherent than the declining imperial order. Organisations such as criminal networks or mafias develop their own codes of communication and loyalty. While their activities may be ethically questionable, they sometimes function according to clear rules rather than the shifting rhetoric of a collapsing state. In this strange reversal the language of the unofficial community may appear more authentic than the official language of empire. The comparison reveals how deeply language shapes perceptions of legitimacy and trust.

Ultimately the fate of empires is inseparable from the language through which they justify themselves. Power depends on narratives that explain why authority exists and why it must be obeyed. When those narratives lose their credibility the empire begins to erode from within. Words that once commanded loyalty become hollow echoes of past conviction. The machinery of control continues to operate, but the belief that sustained it has disappeared. At that moment the empire confronts the same reality that all civilisations eventually face: the recognition that domination cannot indefinitely substitute for genuine human connection. Language may organise power for a time, but it cannot permanently conceal the human cost of treating people as instruments within a system designed to rule them.

Civilization Is A Disease

George Bernard Shaw once declared that civilisation is a disease, a remark that compresses an entire critique of modern society into a single sharp sentence. The claim that civilisation is produced from rotten material suggests that the structures humans build often carry within them the seeds of decay. Cities expand, empires rise, institutions multiply, yet beneath these impressive forms something fragile persists. Civilisation becomes a system assembled from unstable elements: strangers gathered into enormous cities, organisations operating without love, populations detached from the land that once sustained them. The logic of empire often follows the old formula divide et impera, divide and rule. Power consolidates itself by fragmenting communities, separating people from one another while maintaining the appearance of unity. Words play a central role in this process. Empires are not only territories of armies and markets; they are empires of language. Through language they organise authority, create legitimacy, and maintain the illusion that the structures of power are natural and necessary. Yet language itself is not fully controllable. Human beings may invent it or discover it, but once it exists it moves along paths that resemble natural processes. Like a river that changes course despite the intentions of those who live beside it, language develops according to pressures that no single group can completely govern.

Shaw's criticism of civilisation therefore touches a deeper problem. The progress that societies celebrate often distances people from the organic conditions in which human life originally developed. The expansion of institutions, hierarchies, and economic systems introduces artificial expectations that shape behaviour and limit freedom. Civilisation promises refinement and order, yet it frequently generates inequality, exploitation, and moral deterioration. Language participates in this transformation because it is the medium through which social structures are articulated and maintained. Laws, political doctrines, moral codes, and economic rules are all constructed through linguistic expression. In this sense language becomes an instrument of control. The rhetoric of authority persuades populations to accept systems that might otherwise appear intolerable. Propaganda, legal discourse, and administrative language transform power into necessity and hierarchy into order. The structures of civilisation depend upon these linguistic mechanisms because without them the rules governing behaviour could not be justified or enforced. At the same time language can conceal the realities it helps produce. Civilised society often masks its contradictions through carefully chosen words. Euphemisms soften the perception of violence, exploitation, or injustice. Polite speech replaces direct acknowledgment of power relations, creating the impression that social harmony prevails even

when deep inequalities persist. Language therefore becomes a medium of hypocrisy. It allows a society to present itself as humane and rational while obscuring the forces that sustain its privileges. Through these linguistic veils, domination appears as cooperation and coercion appears as duty. Shaw's critique suggests that civilisation maintains its moral authority by manipulating language in precisely this manner.

Language also produces alienation. Modern societies require individuals to operate within systems of communication governed by formal conventions and institutional expectations. People learn to speak according to the demands of professional roles, bureaucratic procedures, or social etiquette. These conventions regulate expression so thoroughly that authentic feeling often becomes difficult to articulate. Individuals adapt their language to the expectations of society rather than allowing their experience to shape their speech. In this process language becomes a mechanism that separates individuals from their own instincts and desires. The result is a condition in which communication continues but authenticity diminishes. The language of civilisation replaces spontaneous expression with disciplined forms of discourse designed to maintain social order. Although language is intended to facilitate understanding, it can also generate misunderstanding. Words do not always convey the meanings speakers intend. Differences in interpretation, ambiguity, and subtle linguistic nuance create opportunities for distortion and conflict. In complex societies these distortions accumulate. Political rhetoric, ideological language, and public debate often transform communication into a struggle over meanings. Instead of clarifying reality, language may deepen divisions by presenting incompatible interpretations of the same events. Miscommunication thus becomes a structural feature of civilisation. The same words can be used to mobilise support, provoke hostility, or conceal responsibility. Language appears to unite people within a shared conversation, yet it simultaneously produces the disagreements that sustain conflict. Ideology demonstrates the power of language to shape perception. Religious doctrines, political narratives, and scientific frameworks rely on language to define the boundaries of belief. Once these linguistic systems become widely accepted they begin to organise how people interpret the world. Individuals may come to accept inequality, competition, or domination as natural because the language surrounding them presents these conditions as inevitable. Ideology therefore operates as a linguistic environment within which individuals construct their identities and expectations. It disconnects people from alternative possibilities by defining the limits of what appears conceivable. In this sense the disease Shaw attributes to civilisation spreads through words that normalise the very structures they describe.

Yet language also contains a creative potential capable of exposing these structures. Literature, theatre, and satire can reveal the contradictions hidden within official discourse. Shaw himself used dramatic language to challenge the assumptions of his time, showing that the same medium which sustains ideology can also undermine it. Words can become instruments of critique when they expose the distance between appearance and reality. Language therefore possesses a double nature. It can serve authority by stabilising social hierarchies, but it can also destabilise those hierarchies by revealing their foundations. The expansion of populations intensifies the complexity of language. As societies grow, they incorporate diverse groups with different dialects, traditions, and cultural vocabularies. The scale of communication expands accordingly. Languages that once served small communities must adapt to larger and more heterogeneous populations. In the process they often move toward standardisation. Dialects and

local forms of speech become absorbed into broader national languages designed to unify diverse regions. Yet this unification carries its own tensions. When language becomes too general it risks losing the subtle distinctions that once allowed communities to express their particular experiences. Communication grows more efficient but also more abstract. At a certain point language may reach a condition of obsolescence, no longer able to represent the diversity of social life it is meant to organise. When this occurs new linguistic forms begin to emerge. Slang, jargon, and specialised vocabularies appear where dialects once existed. These new forms create virtual tribes: communities connected not by geography but by shared interests, professions, or digital networks. The emergence of such parallel structures resembles the political observations made by Václav Havel about post-democratic societies, where official institutions coexist with informal networks that operate according to different rules. Fictional visions such as the fragmented corporate states imagined in *Snow Crash* echo this tendency. As communication networks expand globally, social structures themselves become more fragile. Empires attempt to maintain order by centralising authority around capitals and economic centres, much as planets revolve around a sun. The very word capital suggests both the central city and the accumulation of wealth, linking political power to economic concentration. Yet this centralisation also produces a periphery, regions that remain distant from the centres of influence. To live in the periphery is to recognise limits imposed by structures that originate elsewhere. Only those who understand their boundaries truly inhabit the capital of power.

This tension between centre and periphery reflects a deeper instability within modern civilisation. Systems of control are often constructed in ways that make them vulnerable to collapse. Institutions resemble houses of cards, impressive yet precarious. Because they rely on linguistic authority and symbolic legitimacy, they can be dismantled by shifts in discourse as easily as by physical force. The values that sustain these systems must remain flexible, capable of adapting to changing circumstances. Power therefore operates through constant adjustment rather than fixed principles. It prefers elasticity, ambiguity, and strategic silence. Language becomes the medium through which this flexibility is maintained. One cannot repair a structure designed to break. Language itself may resemble such a structure. Human history can be described as a long sequence of words, arguments, narratives, and debates stretching back tens of thousands of years. Many of the problems discussed throughout this history exist primarily within language itself. They arise because words create distinctions, categories, and conflicts that might not otherwise appear. People argue endlessly about definitions, interpretations, and principles that exist largely as linguistic constructs. The conversation becomes perpetual because language continually generates new disputes. Speaking about a problem, however, is not the same as solving it. Words may circulate indefinitely while action remains absent. The critical question therefore concerns the effect of speech.

Does language help someone act, or does it merely produce further language? Many forms of discourse pursue fame, influence, or control rather than practical change. Ideologies, religions, and scientific systems often function as abstract vocabularies that compete for authority. The struggle among these vocabularies resembles a strategic game in which victory is measured not by resolution but by the capacity to dominate the conversation. In such a game the production of new content becomes an end in itself. The system requires constant novelty, an endless supply of data and words. Actions that might resolve conflicts threaten this cycle because they would end the argument. As long as problems remain within language they sustain the flow of

discourse on which systems of power depend. Civilization then appears as a vast theatre of words, a continuous exchange of claims and counterclaims through which societies maintain themselves while the underlying conditions remain largely unchanged.

The Kekulé Problem Revisited

The Kekulé problem, as Cormac McCarthy once framed it, begins with the chemist who saw in his sleep a snake devouring its tail and awoke knowing that the benzene molecule was a ring. What startled McCarthy was not Kekulé's dream itself but the fact that the unconscious, which must have understood the problem in linguistic terms to begin with, did not simply deliver the solution in plain words: 'It's a ring.' Instead, it offered an image, a symbol, a parable. Why does the unconscious prefer pictures over speech? Why is it that this immense reservoir of knowledge, older than language, seems unwilling or unable to talk to us directly? These questions lead into deeper mysteries: where did language come from? Does the unconscious only know what we tell it, or does it grasp the outer world on its own?

Could it be that the unconscious is in fact wiser than consciousness, its knowledge older, broader, and truer than anything ever written in books or equations? The unconscious, McCarthy argues, is above all a biological system, a machine for operating an animal. Every creature with a nervous system possesses it, and it directs countless activities: scratching an itch, finding food, even solving mathematical problems. Consciousness is merely the tip of an iceberg, and language an even later arrival. Human beings have been directed by unconscious processes for at least two million years, but language has existed for only a fleeting hundred thousand. Before there was speech, there were still dreams, images, instincts, stories told in silence by the night shift of the brain. Language did not emerge because it was necessary. All other mammals thrive without it. Yet once it appeared in a small group of humans in southern Africa, it spread like a contagion, leaping over mountains and oceans. McCarthy compares it to a parasitic invasion: it colonised the brain, occupying whatever areas were least committed, not unlike a virus finding its host. Its power lay in one central leap: the recognition that one thing can be another thing. The sign for water does not only mean the gesture of requesting a drink; it is the water itself. Representation is the root of language, art, trade, mathematics, and everything that followed. But this leap did not replace the unconscious—it only clothed its insights in sound. If language is a recent invader, then the unconscious does not depend on it. Dreams and images show that the unconscious prefers older modes of representation. A picture can be remembered at once; an essay cannot. Symbols compress vast associations into one shape, allowing memory and emotion to work in ways language cannot match. This suggests that the unconscious does not trust words, and perhaps with reason: it survived for two million years without them. Its reluctance to speak directly may indicate that language is too crude, too fragile, too imprecise to bear the weight of its knowledge.

The mystery deepens when we ask whether the unconscious learns everything from us, or whether it perceives the world directly. If it only echoed what the conscious mind provided, it could hardly solve problems that we fail to solve. Yet it does, often surpassing us in subtlety and power. Mathematicians sometimes find answers arriving in sleep. Scientists experience sudden insights after years of failure. Even ordinary people discover forgotten memories or solutions to puzzles in dreams. The unconscious appears to labour under a compulsion to educate us, delivering its lessons in cryptic images so that we must puzzle over them, remember them, and learn from them. Its wisdom is immense, though rarely plain. This raises disturbing

questions: perhaps all our knowledge-gathering is futile. Libraries, experiments, statistics, paradigms—do they merely pile up towers of words, fragile against the silence of the unconscious? Might it be that the ultimate truths, the laws of existence, are already embedded in every organism, every cell, every breath of life, and that our words can only point toward them without ever capturing them? If so, then the unconscious may be the true custodian of knowledge, holding secrets that centuries of philosophy and science have failed to express. The origin of language itself remains mysterious. Unlike vision, which evolved independently many times, language seems to have arisen only once. There are proto-signals in animals—chipmunks with distinct calls for aerial and ground predators—but these never became full languages. There is no evidence of language evolving more than once across species. This singularity suggests it is not a biological adaptation shaped by natural selection but an invention, an idea. Language is an artefact of mind, not of nature. It is, as McCarthy notes, magical, conjuring realities into existence.

Yet its singular origin also reveals its fragility: it is local to Earth, perhaps even to our species alone. It is not, so far as we know, a language of the universe. In this sense, the unconscious might be closer to the world than language ever could be. It draws directly from perception, association, instinct, memory. When it gives us a dream of a snake, it is not speaking in words but offering a direct translation of reality into image. We might envy this capacity, for words are second-order representations: a picture of a deer resembles a deer, but the word ‘deer’ is arbitrary. The unconscious has access to first-order knowledge that precedes words and definitions. No wonder language often feels inadequate, a milepost rather than a destination. What, then, is the role of the conscious, language-using mind? Perhaps not to accumulate endless facts but to interpret what the unconscious already knows. Perhaps at a certain stage of life we must learn to forget the weight of accumulated books and return to intuition, to the wisdom of the body and the instincts of the night shift. Knowledge without language might be closer to truth. Anton Chigurh, one of McCarthy’s dark prophets, asks a haunting question: ‘If the rule you followed brought you to this, of what use was the rule?’ Language is a rule we have followed, but if it brings us only to confusion, to fragile structures of knowledge that collapse, what use is it? The second part of McCarthy’s reflections responds to readers who questioned his ideas. He insists that language is not biological, not selected by evolution like vision or hearing. It is wholly artificial, a construct based on representation, and for that reason it arose once and only once. He underlines that there is nothing in nature that suggests a sound can be a representation of an object. The word water is water solely because we agree that it is. This arbitrariness exposes the strangeness of language: it is not rooted in the world but in convention. Pictures precede words because pictures need no explanation. Words are parasitic upon human agreement. The unconscious, by contrast, is not an invention but a universal biological reality. All animals have it. Before language, humans did not even know that others dreamt, but dreams still shaped their lives. Language added grammar, syntax, and narratives, but it did not replace the older machinery. The unconscious still governs most of what we are, most of what we do, and perhaps most of what we know. What it knows about itself is another mystery. Does it know it will die? Does it care? Its persistence suggests multiple voices, different departments solving different problems, sometimes for us, sometimes for itself.

Unconscious Knowledge and the Futility of Language

Cormac McCarthy’s reflection on the Kekulé problem raises a troubling question about language and thought. The nineteenth-century chemist August Kekulé discovered the ring structure of benzene after dreaming of a snake biting its own tail, the ancient symbol of the

ouroboros. If the unconscious mind understood the chemical problem, McCarthy asks, why did it answer with an image instead of words? His explanation points to evolutionary history. The unconscious mind has operated for nearly two million years, while human language appeared only about one hundred to two hundred thousand years ago. The deeper mind therefore communicates through the older mediums it trusts: images, metaphors, and dreams. Language arrives later, not as the engine of thought but as its summary. Words mark the conclusion of understanding, while the real work of thinking unfolds silently beneath them.

In the end, McCarthy suggests that the world has far more to tell us than we have to tell it. Our knowledge is largely our own life stories. Language has given us history, art, mathematics, poetry, but it has also trapped us in frozen accidents of grammar and convention. The unconscious, older and deeper, offers images and parables, knowing what is best for us even when we cannot understand. Perhaps the true task is not to master the unconscious with language but to listen, to learn, and even to surrender. This conclusion forces us to reconsider the role of philosophy, science, and art. If the unconscious is closer to reality, then perhaps our elaborate systems of knowledge are diversions, rules that lead us astray. The unconscious may be smarter than we are, attuned directly to the outer world in ways we can hardly fathom. At a certain age, when accumulated knowledge feels like a burden, we may need to return to intuition, to the wisdom of the gut, to that primal knowing that cannot be quoted, footnoted, or proven. All else may be futile. What the unconscious knows, it knows without words, and perhaps that is the only knowledge worth trusting. In this light, language is both our greatest invention and our most dangerous illusion. It gave us the power to represent the world, but it also separated us from the direct truths of perception and instinct. The unconscious reminds us of what we have lost: the ability to live by images, parables, and dreams. To listen to it may be the only way to resist the futility of rules, the vanity of endless books, the entropic decay of words. For if the rule we followed has brought us here, of what use was the rule? The answer may lie not in language but in the silence of the unconscious, which has always known more than we do and which still whispers its truths in the darkness.

'The unconscious doesn't know anything about language.

The unconscious mind is a machine for operating an animal.'

-Cormac McCarthy, "The Kekulé Problem" (2017)

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